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The RING

THE 88TH ANNUAL RING AWARDS

THE BEST OF 2016

P.34

MUHAMMAD ALI POSTER INSIDE

CARL FRAMPTON FIGHTER OF THE YEAR

BERNARD HOPKINS

THE STUNNING END TO A GREAT CAREER

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BEST I FACED

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HALL OF FAME

THE CLASS OF 2017 IS ALL ACTION

P. 74

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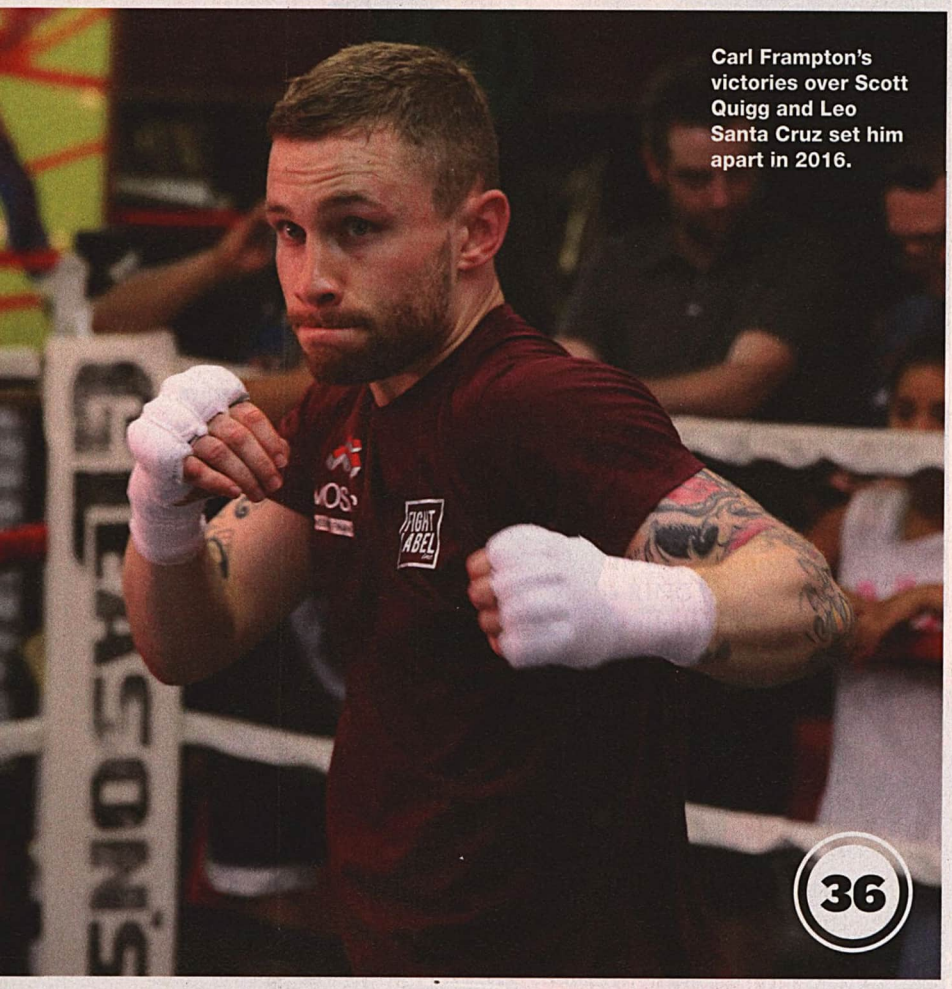

Carl Frampton's victories over Scott Quigg and Leo Santa Cruz set him apart in 2016.

ED DILLER

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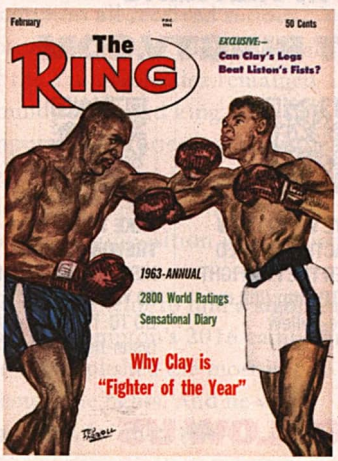

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88

Claressa Shields won her second Olympic gold medal and then turned pro last year.

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The RING

VOLUME 96, NO. 3 / APRIL 2017

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Los Angeles CA, 90025

THE RING (ISSN: 0035-5410), Vol. 96, NO. 3 (April 2017), is published nine times per year (no issues in June, October and February) by Sports and Entertainment Publications, LLC, P.O. Box 90254 Brooklyn, NY 11209. Periodicals postage paid at Brooklyn, NY 11209 and additional post offices. Postmasters: Send change of address notices to: THE RING, P.O. Box 433122, Palm Coast, FL 32164-3122. Single copy price $8.95 in U.S.A. and Canada (£4.95 in the U.K.). Subscription price U.S. And possession $49.00 for nine issues; Canada and Mexico add $7 for nine issues per year and all remaining countries add $15.00 for nine issues per year. Not responsible for the loss or non-return of unsolicited articles or photographs, which will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed envelope bearing the proper amount of postage. The entire contents of this magazine are copyright ©2017 Sports and Entertainment Publications, LLC. No part of this magazine may be reproduced without the written permission of the publisher. All rights reserved. Publisher is not responsible for the accuracy of the content of advertisements appearing in this magazine, nor the delivery or quality of merchandise or services offered. No endorsement of any such advertisement is intended or implied. Advertisers and agencies assume liability for claims arising from the content of their advertisements. FOR ADVERTISING INQUIRES AND RATES: (213) 233-2952. U.S. / Canadian and International distribution by Comag Marketing Group LLC, 155 Village Blvd #200, Princeton, NJ 08540 UK distribution by Comag Tavistock Rd., West Drayton, Middlesex UB77QE, England. Printed in U.S.A

THROUGH THE RINGER

I felt as if I'd gone 12 rounds with Vasyl Lomachenko by the time we finally made a decision on Fighter of the Year for 2016. That's how difficult the selection process was.

The RING editors believe strong cases could be made for five – yes, five – fighters, which was the crux of our dilemma.

Terence Crawford had another strong year, stopping the capable Hank Lundy in five rounds, dominating No. 1-rated Viktor Postol to win a one-sided decision and the RING 140-pound championship (as well as unifying two titles) and knocking out an overmatched John Molina in eight rounds.

Roman Gonzalez successfully defended his flyweight title and then immediately moved up to 115 pounds to face talented junior bantamweight titleholder Carlos Cuadras, whom Gonzalez outpointed in a competitive fight to win a title in a fourth weight division.

Lomachenko gave dazzling performances in knockouts of Roman Martinez and Nicholas Walters as he climbed up pound-for-pound lists.

Old Manny Pacquiao showed plenty of life, easily outpointing Tim Bradley – arguably the strongest opponent of any beaten by the Fighter of the Year candidates – and then doing the same against Jessie Vargas later in the year.

And then there was Carl Frampton, our 2016 Fighter of the Year. Consider what he did:

The Irishman accepted the fight rabid U.K. fans wanted to see, against unbeaten English rival Scott Quigg in what is essentially Quigg's hometown (Manchester) in February. That alone was praiseworthy.

Frampton then won the fight by what should've been a unanimous decision, breaking Quigg's jaw in the process.

In his next fight, five months later, Frampton moved up in weight and again traveled to hostile territory – this time New York – to take on one of the hottest fighters in the world, the unbeaten Leo Santa Cruz.

Frampton never looked better, outclassing his American counterpart to win another clear decision that should've been unanimous.

Carl Frampton landed on top after much debate.

And then, just to add a punctuation mark to a fine year, Frampton immediately agreed to face Santa Cruz in a rematch on Jan. 28 in (you guessed it) Las Vegas. That didn't really factor into our decision but we're impressed with his mindset.

Two authentic challenges in front of his opponents' fans, two impressive victories and another challenge to come. That's how it's done.

Gonzalez, Lomachenko and Frampton all received serious consideration for RING Fighter of the Year. Gonzalez remained pound-for-pound king with two important victories but he struggled against Cuadras. Lomachenko was the most pleasing to the eye but we felt his opposition was a notch below the others.

It was difficult to find a significant flaw in Frampton's 2016 campaign. He accomplished the most in two memorable fights. And he was rewarded for that.

Vasyl Lomachenko (right) embarrassed Nicholas Walters to the point of quitting after seven rounds in November.

BHOP'S MISFORTUNE

I had just finished devouring your excellent feature articles on the impending retirement of Bernard Hopkins ("BHop did it his way" and his self-declared "My greatest victories") in the March 2017 edition when I saw the results of his supposed valedictory fight against Joe Smith Jr., a humiliating eighth-round KO in which BHop was knocked out of the ring. Ouch! It hurt bad to see such a great fighter go out this way. But win, lose or draw, his place among the sport's elite is secure. I hope he won't be tempted to fight again to make up for the humiliating loss. Truth be told, he has just been taught the final lesson most great fighters learn too late – no matter how great you may be, if you keep fighting long enough, you will get badly beaten up. Bernard should have walked away after his last major victory, against Tavoris Cloud in 2013. He would have retired when the ovation was loudest. But, alas, he stayed long enough to be humbled so sadly.

Damola Ifaturoti
Princeton Junction, New Jersey

A BAD LOOK

Nicholas Walters is the last person I would think would quit as he did against Vasyl Lomachenko in November. The guy had been dominating and knocking out boxers in his division. Good luck getting another title fight, buddy; you need redemption now.

Errol Ian Ave Acosta
Twentynine Palms, California

STEP UP

Terence Crawford is a fine fighter but, if he wants to be considered the pound-for-pound best, he must seek out better opponents. Viktor Postol was worthy but John Molina looked as if he wanted to be somewhere else. Kell Brook and Keith Thurman have size, respectable power and defensive skills that could give Crawford problems. I believe either one would be a challenging opponent. Shawn Porter is strong and tough. I thought he earned a draw with Thurman. Porter would be a very live underdog against Crawford in a fight that should have lots of action. Danny Garcia has yet to lose and Tim Bradley has lost only to the best. Crawford would be favored against both, but they are world-class contenders who would add weight to his resume. Crawford must take on the top of his class.

Sherman Lambert
Los Angeles

Editor's note: Crawford is currently a 140-pounder, but his biggest tests probably will come at 147. The most likely big-name opponent might be Manny Pacquiao because both fighters are promoted by Top Rank.

FATHER ISSUES

I recently read that the WBC renewed a rule that forbids fathers to be chief seconds to their own children, the logic being that a father typically allows his son or daughter to take more punishment than necessary. I have no clue how they arrived at this decision or what they are basing it on. Any coach, regardless of his or her relationship to the fighter, might find it hard to stop a fight. Also, since a father can still be in the corner (just not the chief second), what's to keep him from still calling the shots? The WBC's heart is in the right place, I think, but this ruling will do nothing to improve the safety of fighters. When a coach makes the decision to allow his or her boxer to carry on in a dangerous situation, that's when it is up to the referee and other officials to step in and protect that individual.

Davis Clouse
Omaha, Nebraska

ON A ROLL

British boxing is flying high at the moment, with fights filling arenas and getting millions of TV viewers. Boxing in the U.K. hasn't been this healthy in years. For the first time in a long time, Britain can make the claim of being a boxing superpower on the world stage.

Owen Hollifield
Cardiff, Wales

CONTRADICTION

In the March 2017 issue, Michael Rosenthal complains on Page 13 about fighters not taking risks. He then defends Canelo Alvarez for ducking Gennady Golovkin, stating "he shouldn't be coerced into tangling with a monster like Triple-G until he feels he's ready." You can't have it both ways, Mike. And besides, Alvarez is the middleweight champion of the world. If he's not ready to defend that title against all comers, he should step down.

Allen Morris
Belle River, Ontario, Canada

CORRECTION

In the March 2017 edition of THE RING, you feature the legendary fight between Primo Carnera and Max Baer. While discussing their careers after this fight, the caption states that "Carnera was stopped by Joe Louis in the first round the following year." Even Primo wasn't THAT bad a fighter: It took the Brown Bomber six rounds to dispose of him, although I'd bet that Carnera wished it had only been one round after what Louis did to him. Anyway, thank you for keeping old-fight film buffs like me on my toes.

D. Sinkler

Editor's note: Thank YOU for keeping us on our toes. We regret the error.

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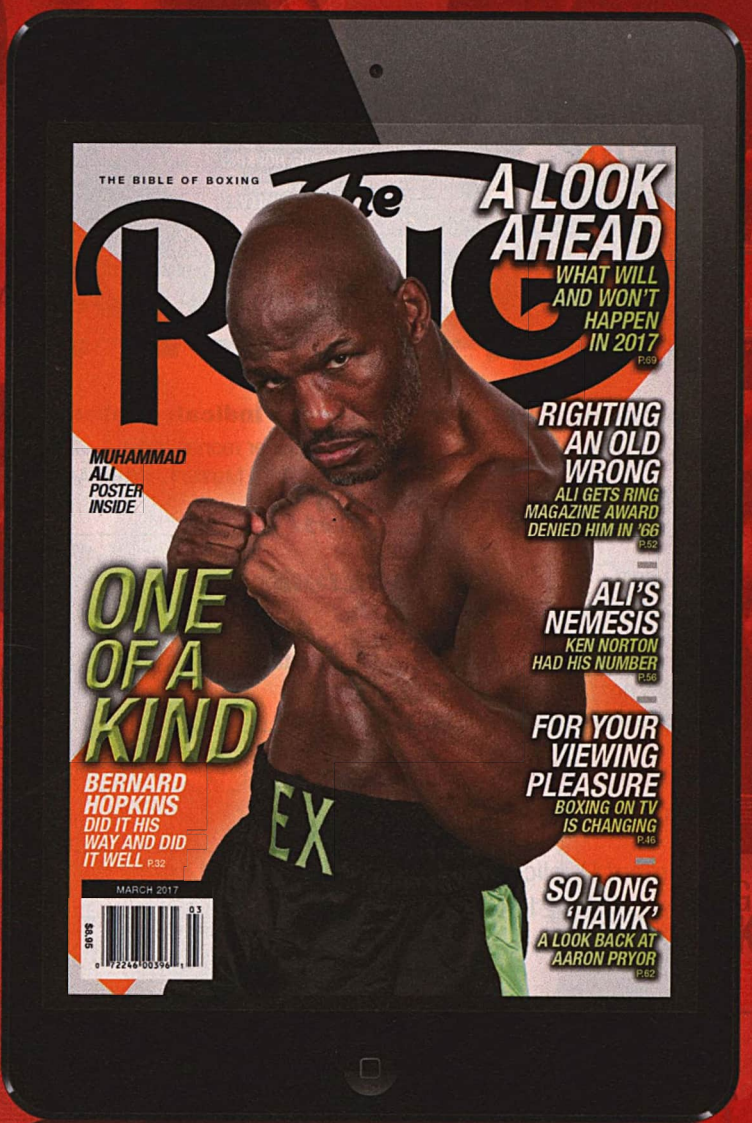

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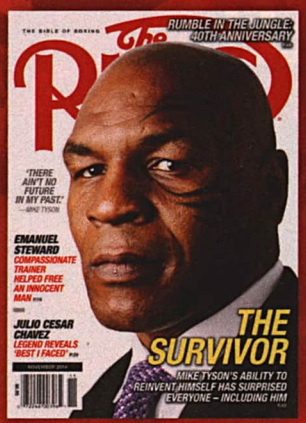

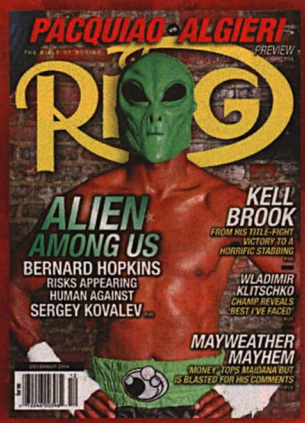

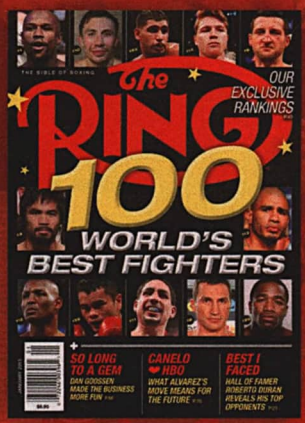

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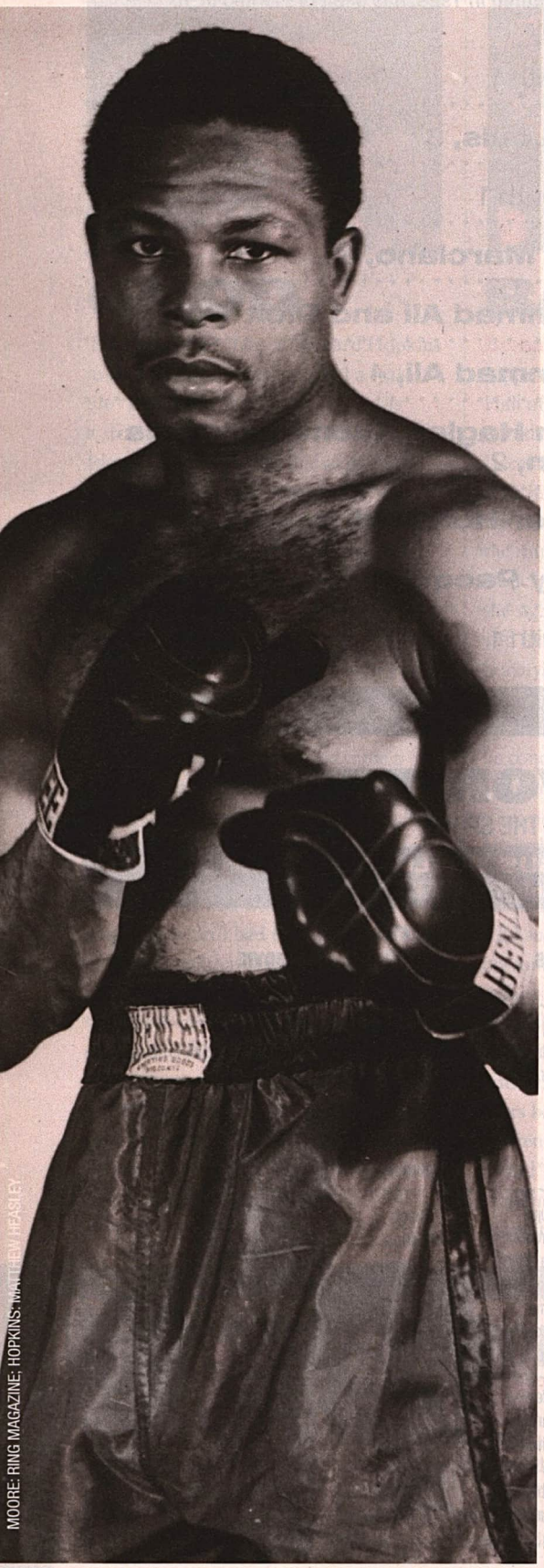
ADVANCED DEGREES



Degrees of separation between fighters of the past and their more contemporary counterparts. This month, regular contributor Gregg Morgan connected two ageless light heavyweight stars – **Archie Moore** and **Bernard Hopkins** – in only five steps even though Moore last fought in 1963, more than a half century before Hopkins' goodbye fight in December.

ARCHIE MOORE
fought

MUHAMMAD ALI,
who fought

TREVOR BERBICK,
who fought

IRAN BARKLEY,
who fought

RANDY SMITH,
who fought

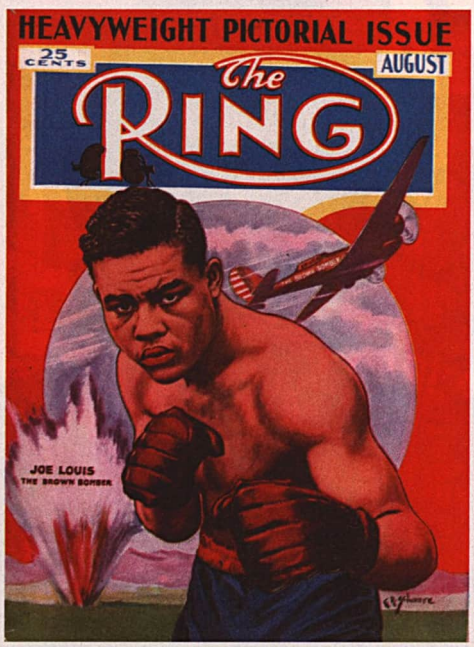
BERNARD HOPKINS

Archie Moore (left) and Bernard Hopkins fought professionally for a combined 55-plus years.

MOORE: RING MAGAZINE; HOPKINS: MATTHEW HEASLEY

10 A MONTHLY BOXING LIST

This month: The RING Magazine Fighter of the Year award, which was instituted in 1928, has been presented in 10 decades. Here are the fighters who were honored the most times per decade:



1920s – 2 tied with 1

1930s – Joe Louis, 3

1940s – 10 tied with 1

1950s – Rocky Marciano, 3

1960s – Muhammad Ali and Dick Tiger, 2

1970s – Muhammad Ali, 4

1980s – Marvin Hagler, Thomas Hearns and Mike Tyson, 2

1990s – Evander Holyfield, 2

2000s – Manny Pacquiao, 3

2010s – 7 tied with 1

FIGHTERS' FAVORITES

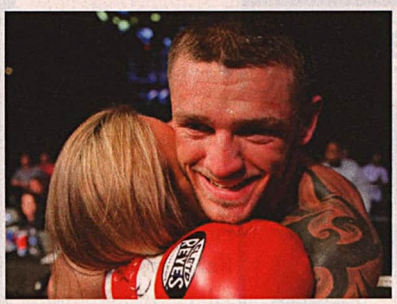
★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ WHAT BOXERS ARE INTO OUTSIDE THE SPORT ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

1. JOSE RAMIREZ JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHT CONTENDER / **2. JESUS CUELLAR** FEATHERWEIGHT CONTENDER / **3. LEE HASKINS** BANTAMWEIGHT TITLEHOLDER

FIGHTER	MUSIC	CAR	FOOD	TATTOOS	ATHLETE OUTSIDE BOXING	MOVIE	VIDEO GAME
1.	"I like Mexican music – 'corridos,' especially with Banda."	"I have a Dodge Sport Hemi 1500 truck and a Dodge Challenger 6.4L R/T Scat Pack Shaker. Future car, a Ferrari 458 or any car with power."	**Mexican food – espinazo, mole, menudo and pozole."**	"No tattoos, and don't plan to get any either."	"Don't have a favorite athlete now, just follow a few: Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi and Javier 'Chicharito' Hernandez."	"'300' and 'Price of Glory.'"	"'FIFA 2016.'"
2.	"AC/DC."	"I drive a Ford Focus Titanium and my dream car is a **Lamborghini Aventador**."	"Argentine-style beef ribs."	"Virgin of Lujan (Argentina's patroness), a rosary and the letters saying 'Forastero' (both his nickname and the name of his late horse)."	"Diego Maradona."	"'300.'"	"'God of War.'"
3.	"All sorts really – a bit of hip-hop, some of the old '80s songs."	"I drive a BMW X5. I'd like to have a Lamborghini; that would be nice."	"Pizza."	"I've got a few – one of a gun on my side, a money symbol on the other side. I have a rosary chain around my neck."	**"Cristiano Ronaldo."**	"'Independence Day.'"	**"'Grand Theft Auto.'"**

— Anson Wainwright

THE BEST AND WORST IN BOXING FROM THE PAST MONTH By Michael Rosenthal

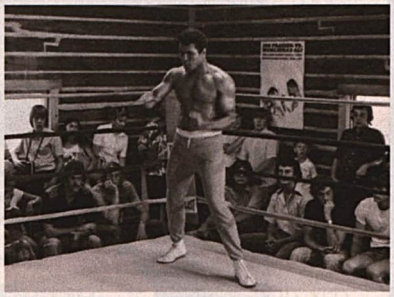


GOOD

The unfortunate fate of Bernard Hopkins in his final fight overshadowed a real-life "Rocky" story. **Joe Smith Jr.** is a strapping 27-year-old from Long Island who works full-time as a union laborer and boxes professionally on the side, although that almost certainly is in the process of changing after an eventful 2016. Smith burst onto the scene by virtue of his stunning first-round knockout of Andrzej Fonfara in June. He followed that in December by punching Hopkins through the ropes and into retirement before a large audience on national television. Yes, he came a long way in a very short time. And you have to be happy for him. Smith by all indications is classy. He showed Hopkins the utmost respect after their fight, saying simply and without emotion, "I had to do what I had to do." He then demonstrated that his sudden success hadn't gone to his head; he reportedly went back to work shortly after he returned to New York. Great story. And it could get better. Smith is now a player at 175 pounds. He is a prime candidate to fight Andre Ward, Sergey Kovalev or Adonis Stevenson. And with his punching power, anything is possible.

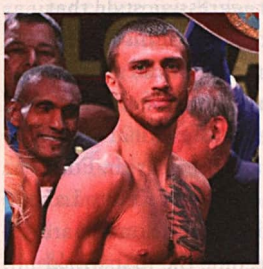
BAD

Bernard Hopkins' career wasn't supposed to end that way. The future Hall of Famer, 51 when he stepped into the ring to fight Joe Smith Jr. on December 17, was supposed to go out with his hand raised or at least on his feet; he wasn't supposed to go out of the ring, as Joe Louis did against Rocky Marciano in his last fight. I'll never forget the sight of him flying through the ropes and onto his back on the floor. It was horrifying, then depressing. The good news is that we don't have to dwell on it. I prefer to remember the manner in which he conducted himself outside the ring – his unrivaled work ethic, the way he took care of himself, his professionalism. He is the perfect role model for his fellow boxers. I prefer to remember his amazing run as middleweight champion – 20 successful defenses (including one no-contest) and a 10-year reign, both records in the division. And I prefer to remember the many important victories, particularly the "upsets" when common sense told us he should've retired many years before. It seems foolish now to have written him off. The expression "one of a kind" is overused but it aptly describes Hopkins. To say he'll be missed is an understatement.



WORSE

The world seemed to lose an inordinate number of beloved personalities in 2016. Boxing certainly didn't escape unscathed. Of course, the most notable loss was the passing of "The Greatest," **Muhammad Ali.** The world was braced for his death for many years because of his health issues but, when it actually happened in June, it seemed to hit everyone hard. The concept that he no longer walks the earth is still hard to fathom. I once thought nothing could stop Aaron Pryor, a true force of nature in the ring. We lost him, too. I had the honor of getting to know Bobby Chacon, a fierce warrior who also happened to be one of the sweetest individuals you could ever meet. That one was difficult for me. And, among many other losses, one that stands out to me is the passing of young Mike Towell. That was particularly heartbreaking because it probably could've been avoided. He had complained of headaches before the fight in which he died. Many observers have noted that it was a miserable year for the sport, usually referring to a general lack of compelling matchups. I think more about the special figures we lost.



RING POLL

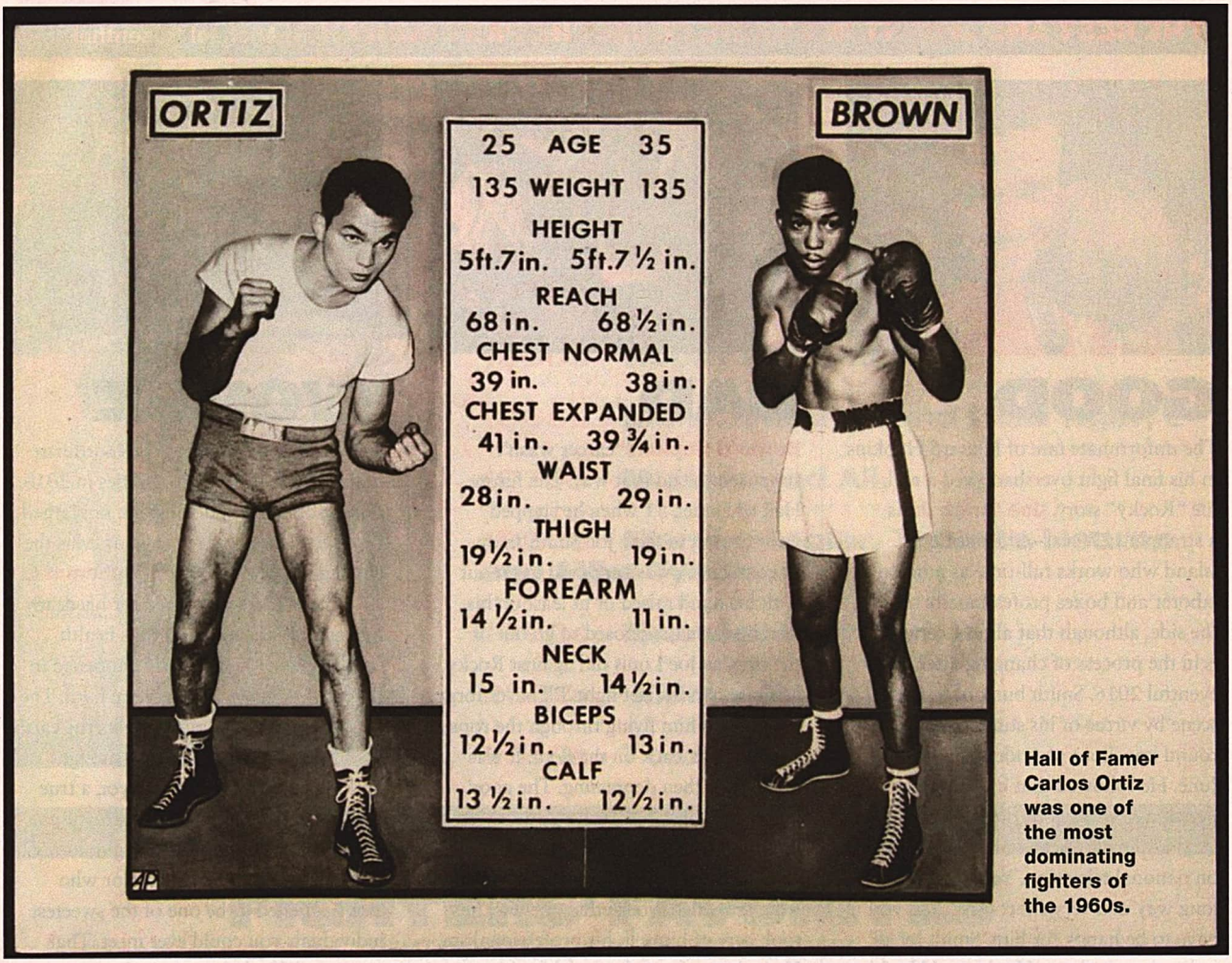
A MONTHLY POLL OF OUR RINGTV.COM READERS

A number of elite fighters turned in very strong performances this year. With that in mind, we asked: **Who is the 2016 Fighter of the Year?** Here is how you responded.

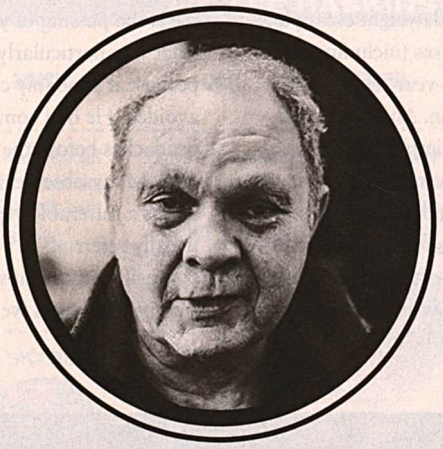
THE PERCENTAGES

36.63	VASYL LOMACHENKO	5.32	ANDRE WARD
17.22	CARL FRAMPTON	4.58	JOE SMITH JR.
11.05	TERENCE CRAWFORD	4.31	OTHER
9.26	MANNY PACQUIAO	3.64	SERGEY KOVALEV
6.76	ROMAN GONZALEZ	1.23	JERMALL CHARLO

NOTE: 8,553 READERS VOTED



Hall of Famer Carlos Ortiz was one of the most dominating fighters of the 1960s.



CARLOS ORTIZ

61-7-1 (30 KOs)

Carlos Ortiz is known today only by the most devoted historians of the sweet science. In his time, though, he was one of the most popular and best fighters in the world.

Ortiz, now 80 years old, was born in Puerto Rico but moved to New York as a child. He learned to fight on the streets but drifted into the gym, where he developed a refined but aggressive style that overwhelmed many of his opponents and made him one of the greatest Puerto Rican fighters of all time.

Ortiz turned professional in 1955 after a solid amateur career. Four years later, he stopped Kenny Lane in two rounds at Madison Square Garden to become the first world

junior welterweight champion when the weight class was reinstituted after 13 years.

He lost the title to fellow Hall of Famer Duilio Loi in 1960, but he really was just getting started as a championship fighter.

On April 21, 1962, well into his peak period, Ortiz defeated Joe Brown – another Hall of Famer – by a wide unanimous decision to win the more prestigious lightweight championship in Las Vegas. He would hold at least one major 135-pound title for most of the next six years, beating some of the best fighters of the day – Ismael Laguna (in two of three fights), Sugar Ramos (twice) and Flash Elorde (twice), among others.

Ortiz successfully defended the belt he won in 1962 four times, lost it to Laguna, took it back seven months later and then lost it for good to Teo Cruz by a split decision in 1968.

The victory over Brown, Ortiz said, was the proudest moment of his career.

"Nothing more exciting, more amazing than to win the championship against Brown," he said. "It was a fight that made me champion, a fight [in which] I had to be very careful because Joe Brown was a heck of a puncher and he was a heck of a fighter. I had to put every effort into my fight with him. It just happened. I was successful."

Ortiz fought only once in a 3½-year period after the Cruz setback but returned to beat nine second-tier opponents in 1971 and 1972. That set up what was supposed to be one last shot at the 135-pound title against champion Roberto Duran. However, Duran pulled out and was replaced by Ken Buchanan, the man Duran had beaten to win the title.

On Sept. 20, 1972, in the same arena in which he had knocked out Lane, a faded Ortiz quit on his stool against Buchanan. He never fought again.

Ortiz (61-7-1, 30 knockouts) was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1991. He has been married for 30 years and has three children. He lives in the Bronx and is enjoying life but he misses his glory days.

"I retired from boxing and I haven't missed anything in my life more than boxing," he said. "That says it all. I wish that I could re-enter my life back into my fighting days."

BEST JAB

Ismael Laguna: In my career, I would say Carlos Ortiz! I used to practice the jab because from the jab comes all the combinations. I learned this from watching different fighters fighting in the gym, and I practiced it and it turned out terrific for me. There were a few of them. Laguna was a good boxer, a good puncher, although he didn't show it. He was an intelligent boxer. His jab was good because he was fast. He didn't let you hit him before he hit you with a jab.

BEST DEFENSE

Laguna: He was a good boxer, he was a good puncher, he was fast and he had a good defense. To me, of the ones I fought, he was the best defensively.

BEST CHIN

Johnny Busso: He not only was a good boxer but he had a good chin. I fought him and thumped the s--t out of him and he thumped the s--t out of me, but I got to him and won the fight. I couldn't knock him out; he had a good defense and chin.

FASTEST HANDS

Laguna: He was fast, he had a natural ability. In boxing you have to have ... something and he had fast, fast hands. I knew how to work through it, with [my own] speed and intelligence.

FASTEST FEET

Laguna: There were a few of them but Laguna had good speed. He was a good boxer, good jabber, good fighter.

SMARTEST

Joe Brown: Most of them were smart. That's a tough question. ... I would say Joe Brown, definitely.

STRONGEST

Busso: He was physically very strong. He could punch and box but I beat him because I was a better boxer than he was.

BEST PUNCHER

Brown: Busso was a good puncher but Brown was the best puncher. He got power in his left jab, his left hook, he got power in his right hand. He was a good boxer, a good body puncher. He was the best. I just happened to be a little bit better than him. Busso was a good puncher, but I beat him because of my boxing ability.

BEST SKILLS

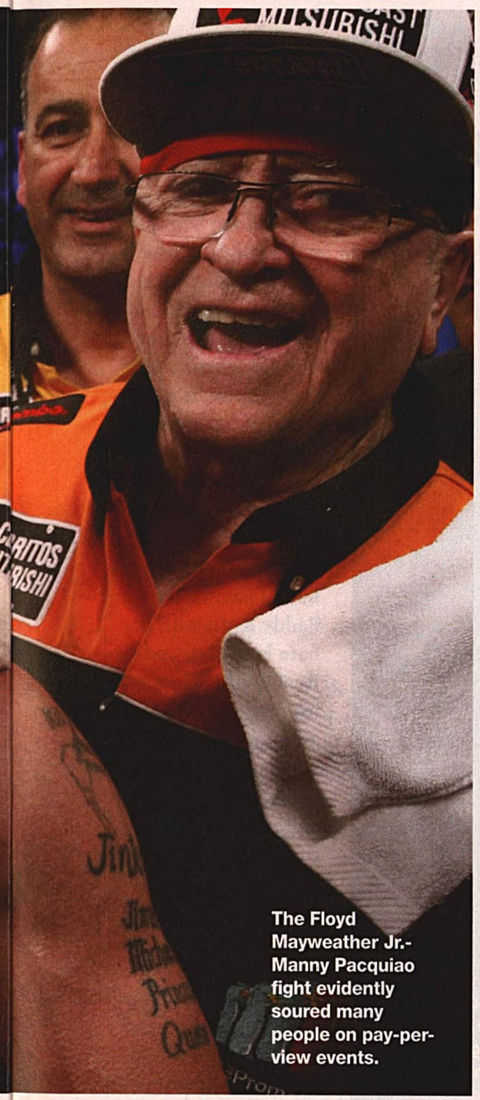
Brown: Brown had the boxing skills, and that's why he was champion for so long. In order to be champion for a long time you've got to be good. Besides him, Laguna was good. Nicolino Locche was good, too.

BEST OVERALL

Brown: The best fighter I fought was Joe Brown. He was the champion and he was the champion for a long time. And when I beat him, I beat him pretty good. Joe Brown was fast, he had a great jab, he had a great right hand, a great hook, he boxed terrifically. By having all of this he was a great fighter. I have to say I beat Joe Brown with my skills and my youth because he was going out of style. I overwhelmed him with my strength and boxing skill.

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright

By David Greisman



The Floyd Mayweather Jr.-Manny Pacquiao fight evidently soured many people on pay-per-view events.

JOHN GUZNISKI

NAY-PER-VIEW

BOXING'S SHORT-SIGHTED APPROACH IS ALIENATING FUTURE CUSTOMERS

Floyd Mayweather Jr. vs. Manny Pacquiao didn't kill off the pay-per-view industry in the United States. That's not stopping the powers that be from trying to finish the job.

Mayweather-Pacquiao drew 4.6 million buys in May 2015, with revenue exceeding $500 million. It is a mark that will likely never be broken by a single fight. Even if you added up all of the boxing pay-per-views that took place in 2016 and all that are expected to occur in 2017 – and there are a lot of them – the numbers won't approach that total.

This year already has two on the menu. Gennady Golovkin will face Daniel Jacobs in March; that's a good one, even if it might not have been pay-per-view in the past. The other is more laughable than laudable: Miguel Cotto, unseen for 15 months after his loss to Canelo Alvarez, against James Kirkland, missing in action for 21 months, also after a loss to Canelo.

(There's also a minor show involving Roy Jones Jr. vs. Bobby Gunn. Anyone who buys that will receive a free psychological exam.)

Last year's six major pay-per-views included two fights between two of the best in their divisions (Terence Crawford vs. Viktor Postol and Sergey Kovalev vs. Andre Ward), two bouts involving a name fighter against a respectable opponent (Manny Pacquiao vs. Tim Bradley and Jessie Vargas), and two fights that were unnecessary mismatches from the moment they were announced (Canelo vs. Amir Khan and Liam Smith).

Their numbers were mostly disappointing, evidence that fans aren't necessarily going to pay for matchups that might've been televised as part of an HBO or Showtime package. One could argue that those who buy pay-per-view events aren't getting as much for their money as they once did.

This year will bring at least three additional pay-per-views, if not more: Canelo against whomever he faces in May, which at press time was looking like it could be Julio Cesar Chavez Jr.; Canelo against Gennady Golovkin in late 2017, should they reach an agreement; and at least one Pacquiao fight (which may or may not involve HBO, given that the Vargas show didn't).

The only fight that's truly worth the price is Canelo vs. GGG, a bout involving two superstars at the top of the sport. The industry has gotten away with featuring a single superstar taking on challengers who were at least respectable, if not better: Mayweather and Pacquiao banked big bucks for years that way. Now Pacquiao makes much less, but he still comes at a special cost even if what he does and whom he does it against is no longer as special.

There's a certain number of fans and boxing addicts who'll shell out no matter what. But the numbers are dropping, and the industry's habits aren't helping.

When shows involving the bigger stars on regular HBO do take place, they tend to be mismatches. Last year, for example, Sergey Kovalev took out Jean Pascal and Isaac Chilemba while Andre Ward bested Sullivan Barrera and Alexander Brand on the network. Those shows weren't memorable, which didn't make the pay-per-views more marketable.

There was a time a decade ago when the number of stars and the size of their paychecks led to a glut of pay-per-views even greater than what we have now. Not all of those shows sold great, but they at least took place at a time when the third fight between Pacquiao and Erik Morales could still pull in more than double what Kovalev-Ward did.

There were more boxing fans back then. There was less piracy, less of an ability to watch for free through an illicit stream or by waiting just a brief bit before searching YouTube.

HBO's executives would argue that this situation is not their fault, that its budget is smaller, and that subsidizing fighters and spotlighting less competitive fights helps them maintain relationships with the boxers and build toward the big fights. It still airs many of the best fighters. But competitive matchmaking tends to be an exception and no longer the rule.

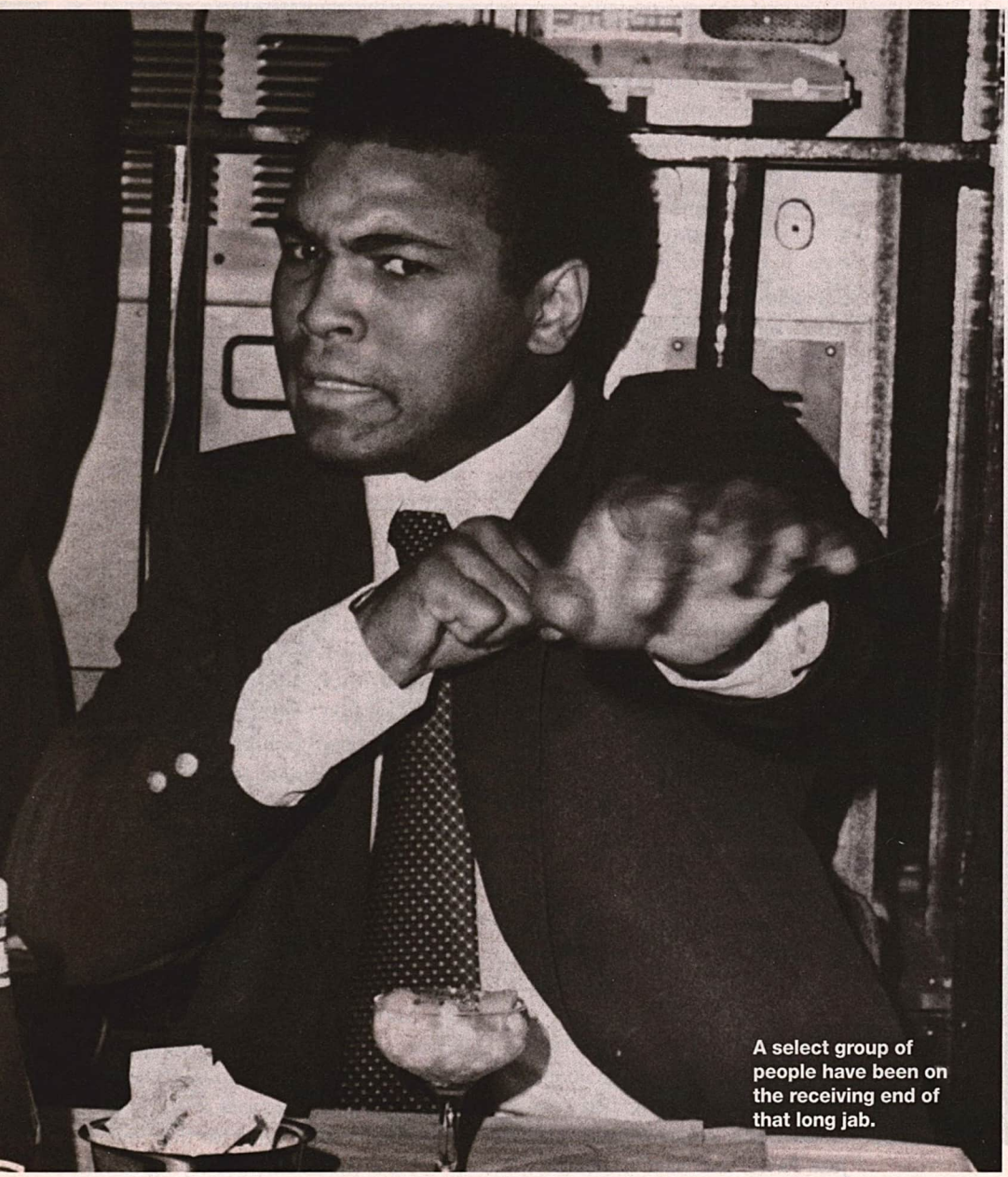
The network profits so long as it continues to receive subscriber money, and it also gets a cut of pay-per-view revenue. HBO spent a bunch of our money on making the fights that led to making Kovalev-Ward. Even if Kovalev-Ward didn't make HBO a bunch of money in return, HBO will continue to earn so long as its subscribers remain.

They do remain for now, though the network isn't winning over fans who are being asked to loosen their purse strings to compensate for the network's being tight. That is a poor way of maintaining the most important relationship — the one HBO has with its customers.

Mayweather-Pacquiao scared off casual boxing fans who realized that spending on famous names doesn't guarantee that they'll get the commensurate value for their money.

Now the business is trying to take advantage of its regular customers. It's subscribing to the philosophy that less is more when it comes to the quality of its shows, and it's giving its subscribers more of less. That turns off people who are increasingly cutting cords and seeking out options at lower cost (or none at all).

No one seems to care about the long-term. They want to make money now and worry about the future later. A small group of fighters and companies will see short-term gains. But if we keep up this model, then everybody will end up losing in the end. RING



A select group of people have been on the receiving end of that long jab.

WHEN ALI PUNCHED ME

THOMAS HAUSER HAD THE HONOR OF TAKING A SHOT (SORT OF) FROM 'THE GREATEST'

"The Sweet Science is joined onto the past like a man's arm to his shoulder."

Those words, written by A. J. Liebling in an introduction to his famed collection of essays entitled "The Sweet Science," are part of boxing lore.

To further the point, Liebling proclaimed, "It is through Jack O'Brien that I trace my rapport with the historic past through the laying-on of hands. He hit me, for pedagogical example, and he had been hit by the great Bob Fitzsimmons, from whom he won the light-heavyweight title in 1906. Jack had a scar to show for it. Fitzsimmons had been hit by Corbett, Corbett by John L. Sullivan, he by Paddy Ryan with the bare knuckles, and Ryan by Joe Goss, his predecessor who as a young man had felt the fist of the great Jem Mace. It is a great thrill to feel that all that separates you from the early Victorians is a series of punches on the nose."

In a small way, I'm part of the chain.

In 1988, I was chosen by Muhammad and Lonnie Ali to be Muhammad's official biographer. One of the benefits inherent in the undertaking was that I spent a lot of time at Ali's home in Berrien Springs, Michigan. With Liebling's thoughts in mind, I decided one afternoon that it would be fun to insert myself into the historical sequence.

Muhammad and I were watching tapes of old fights in Ali's living room.

"Could you touch me with a jab?" I asked.

I explained the request, and Muhammad weighed his options. The ensuing conversation went

RING MAGAZINE

roughly as follows.

"I might hurt you bad."

"I said 'touch,' not 'punch.'"

"I'm a bad man."

"No, you're not."

"I might think I'm hittin' Joe Frazier and put you in the hospital."

"Don't."

"Are you sure?"

"Am I sure I don't want you to put me in the hospital? Yes."

"There's times I don't know my own strength."

"Be gentle."

Ali stood up, gestured for me to do the same and positioned me in front of the sofa. He was closing in on age 50 at the time.

"Put your hands up," he instructed.

I did as ordered.

Muhammad gave me a long look, extended his upper teeth over his lower lip in that famous I'm-gonna-get-you pose, assumed a fighting stance, and did a modified Ali shuffle.

"Here comes the jab," he warned.

Then he hit me on the cheek with a right hand that felt like a caress.

"Want more?"

"Bring it to me."

The jab that followed had the weight of a feather.

I've experienced some pretty cool things in my life. One of them is that I was "punched" by Muhammad Ali.

★ ★ ★

When Sergey Kovalev fought Andre Ward in Las Vegas on November 19, the promotion brought in Julio Cesar Chavez Sr. to help engender pay-per-view buys in the Hispanic market.

An appearance fee is in order when a retired boxing legend travels to promote a fight. But other requests can be problematic. Over the years, fighters have demanded everything from a refrigerator full of Dom Perignon to a bedroom full of women.

And Chavez?

Not to worry.

The only extra that Julio Sr. asked for was that his room be fully stocked with Doritos and Cheetos.

★ ★ ★

Anyone who thinks that boxing is brutal should check out Michael Buffer's travel schedule.

Buffer was in Las Vegas to perform his "let's get ready to rumble" magic in conjunction with Kovalev-Ward. The following four weekends saw him return to Las Vegas (November 26) and then travel to Moscow (December 3), Manchester, England (December 10), and Ekaterinburg, Russia (December 17).

In addition, Buffer made an appearance in Burbank, California, to accept a special "Icon Award" from the Society of Voice Arts and Sciences. The two previous recipients of that award were James Earl Jones and William Shatner.

During the past two years, Buffer has been in 17 countries on four continents and traveled almost 1.5 million miles. And you thought fighting Gennady Golovkin was hard.

★ ★ ★

A vast marketing machine has been put in place to sell Muhammad Ali products. Two books among the first wave of publications have the most promotional resources behind them and, thus, are likely to get the most attention.

"Muhammad Ali: The Tribute" is a hardcover book produced by the editors of Sports Illustrated.

Sports Illustrated was one of the first major media outlets to understand that Ali was a great fighter and also that his importance extended well beyond boxing. The SI tribute book reflects that understanding in real time. It contains the complete original text of 16 articles that appeared in the magazine and track Ali's life from his origins as Cassius Clay to the glory years as Muhammad Ali and, ultimately, his courageous end. The articles – written by Huston Horn, Tex Maule, George Plimpton, Edwin Shrake, Mark Kram, Pat Putnam, William Nack and Gary Smith – are supplemented by excerpts from additional Ali pieces that appeared in Sports Illustrated and well-chosen photographs. The production values are superb.

By contrast, "Muhammad Ali Unfiltered" (a photo book from Jeter Publishing) falls short of the mark. The photos are loosely organized into sections entitled Ali the Fighter, Ali the Activist, Ali the Man and Ali the Icon. But there's no coherent flow from photo to photo or tagline captions to identify the photos. Quotes from Ali are sprinkled throughout the manuscript but often bear little or no relationship to the photo they're paired with. The images themselves – particularly, the color photos – are poorly reproduced. And despite the book's title, this is a very-much-filtered version of Ali with virtually no mention of Nation of Islam doctrine or anything else that might conflict with a sanitized portrait of The Greatest.

"Muhammad Ali: The Tribute" is a treasure. "Muhammad Ali Unfiltered" is a disappointment.

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thauser@rcn.com. His most recent book – "A Hard World: An Inside Look at Another Year in Boxing" – was published recently by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism.

Only a fake beard could make Bernard Hopkins look his age before his career finale against Joe Smith Jr.

HAVE AN EXIT PLAN

BERNARD HOPKINS STRESSES THAT FIGHTERS MUST FIND A PURPOSE WHEN THEY RETIRE

This is one in a series of columns by future Hall of Famer Bernard Hopkins, who gives us his thoughts on various subjects important to every boxer and fan. This issue: Fighters should have a Plan B when they call it quits.

As I watched the tape of my fight against Joe Smith Jr., days later, I still maintain it was a punch-and-push that sent me through the ropes in my last fight on December 17, 2016. It was momentum that sent me through the ropes. The floor hit me harder than Joe hit me the whole fight.

I will say this: It was my last fight. There's no doubt, no questions, no anything. That was my last fight.

Retirement is something I've been prepared for for a few years now. My advice to any fighters who are thinking about retirement: If they're thinking about it, then retire. They have to. If you go in that ring with any doubt or thought that you can't do what you used to do, then you're done and there is a chance you'll get hurt.

It's like any walk of life. In relationships, for example, if you're thinking about whether or not to be with your girlfriend or if you should marry the girl you've been seeing, don't do it. Debating it inside your head tells you right there that it's not good. Get out, quit. The same thing goes with boxing. It's really a black-and-white situation.

Too many fighters are in denial when they near the end of their careers. Those who put on gloves and punch and take punches for money think they can beat up anyone in the world and that they're able to do it as long as they live.

Believe me, they can't.

It has to end sometime. And too many fighters today have no exit plan. They throw everything into their careers and think they can live a certain way for the rest of their lives. They can't. I didn't want to leave the way I did, but I can leave the ring knowing I fulfilled a legacy that people will talk about until the end of time.

And now I have my HBO broadcasting career that I'm beginning. And I swear, just like I worked to become one of the best fighters in the world, I'm going to work just as hard to become the best ringside color analyst. I've been practicing and seeing a speech teacher to work on my words and communication. I also want to find the next superstar, who will break all my records and every record out there.

It's hard when a chapter in your life closes.

I went to Florida and relaxed and recovered during the Christmas holidays. My downtime and realization that it was over was great. Six months from now, I'll be back in the gym working out because I want to look good in a suit. Again, though, I'm definitely not coming back. I'm done, done, done, done. Stick a pitchfork in me and turn me over I'm so done.

My reality hit me years ago that I was finished. But my strong mind and work ethic got me by in this current state of boxing until I finally decided to retire.

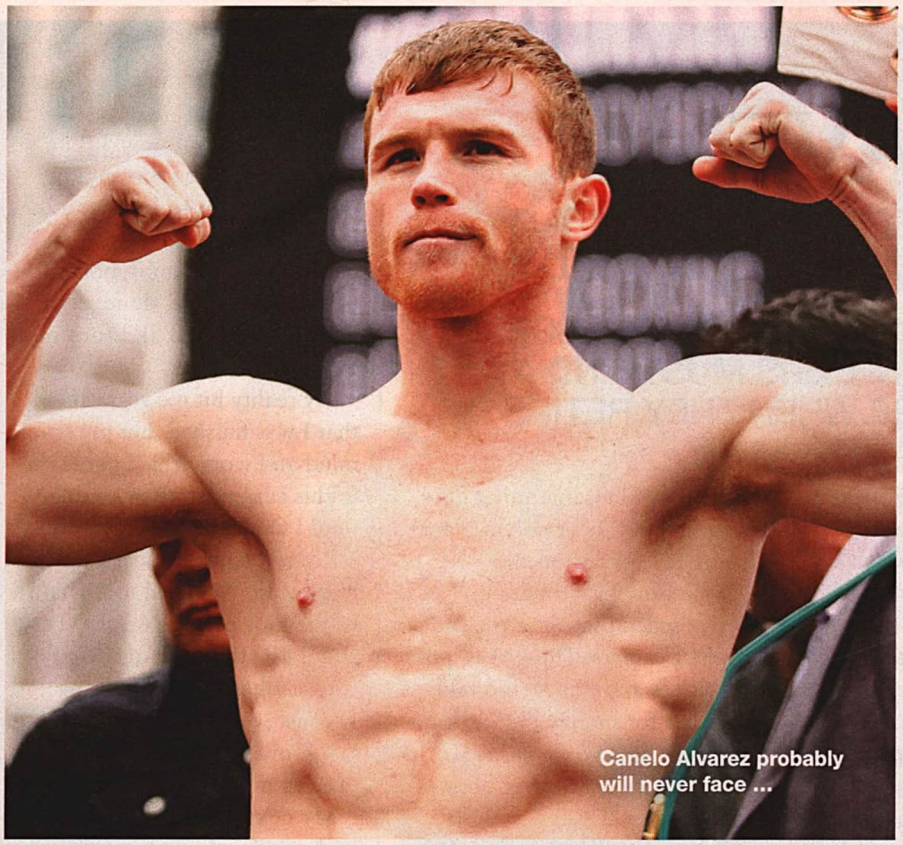
Retired fighters have a duty to educate. We need to explain to the kids coming up that they should be thinking of their future when they're fighting because, once again, it doesn't last. Time remains undefeated, even in my case.

My next role is as a boxing ambassador. I want to reach out and let people know the beauty of the sport.

George Foreman was the best boxing color commentator. Lennox Lewis was great. I want to be like them. It's why when I was training for the fight against Joe Smith, I was still working on my broadcasting skills. I've been watching and listening to non-boxing color commentators. I'm watching ex-football and ex-basketball players speak and articulate their words. I'm back in school in how to be that actor, though I'm not acting, and becoming a complete expert on the sweet science.

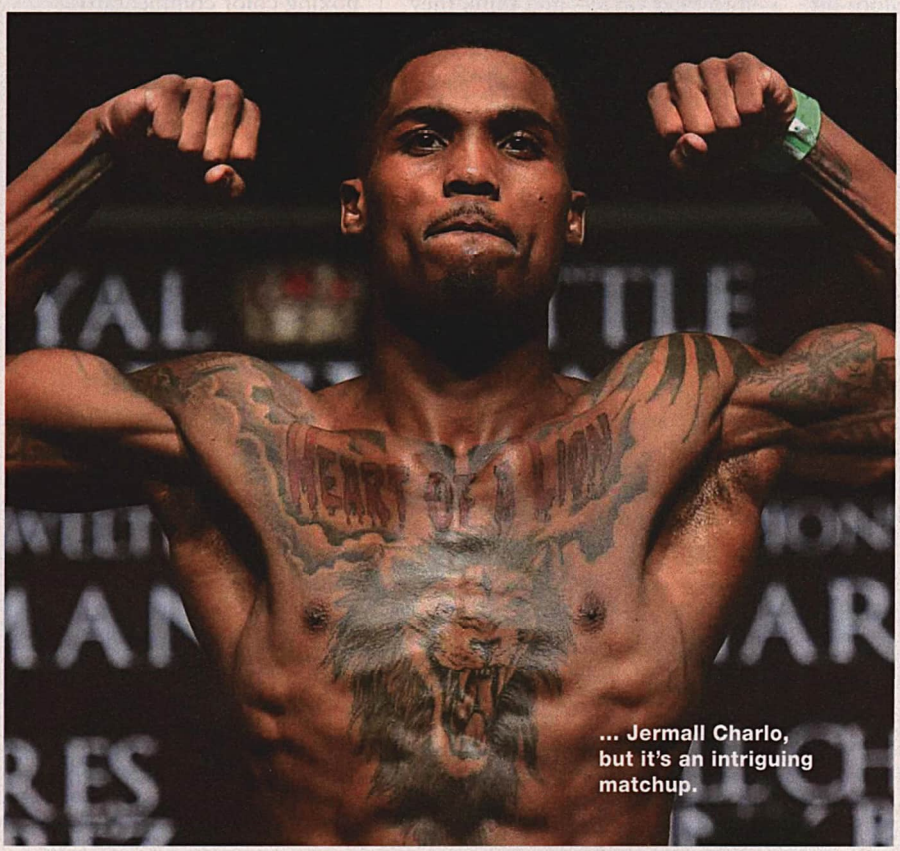
If you have a plan made, fighters thinking about retirement should start the transition process a year, maybe two years ahead. This way you have a soft landing when it's over. Retired fighters have to spell out what multitasking is to the younger guys.

You need something to fall back on. And not just the floor.



Canelo Alvarez probably will never face ...

CANELO ALVAREZ VS. JERMALL CHARLO



... Jermall Charlo, but it's an intriguing matchup.

THREE EXPERTS – A FIGHTER, A TRAINER AND A MEDIA MEMBER – TELL YOU HOW A MYTHICAL MATCHUP WOULD PLAY OUT

Sometimes in boxing it only takes a moment for your entire reputation to change.

In the case of Jermall Charlo, he went from ho-hum IBF junior middleweight titleholder to a major force in the sport courtesy of one perfectly timed punch last December. A ferocious right uppercut in Round 5 dropped top contender Julian Williams on his face, and although the stricken challenger got to his feet, a brief follow-up assault prompted the referee to halt the contest.

It was the type of performance that gives a fighter the right to call out the best and Charlo knew it. "Cinnamon" was the cry during the 26-year-old Texan's post-fight interview, which is the English translation for Mexico's "Canelo" Alvarez, the RING middleweight champion and the WBO junior middleweight titleholder.

A matchup between the pair would be fantastic but Golden Boy Promotions, which represents Canelo, and Charlo's manager, Al Haymon, aren't likely to do business. Thus, it's doubtful that these two boxing powerbrokers will meet in the ring anytime soon.

THE RING liaised with three boxing experts for their take on this most unlikely of world-title bouts.

ALVAREZ ★ TALE OF THE TAPE ★ CHARLO

154 POUNDS

ALVAREZ		CHARLO
26	AGE	26
48-1-1 (34 KOS)	RECORD	25-0 (19 KOS)
68.0	KO PERCENTAGE	76.0
ORTHODOX	STANCE	ORTHODOX
5 FEET 9 INCHES (175 CM)	HEIGHT	6 FEET (183 CM)
70 INCHES (179 CM)	REACH	73 INCHES (187 CM)

FIGHTER

AUSTIN TROUT
Former WBA junior middleweight titleholder

Canelo has a bit of everything – speed, power, explosiveness and decent footwork. He's also the cash cow in this game, so you don't just have to beat him, you have to beat him decisively. The thing is, I don't think Canelo is getting any better as a fighter and in my opinion he's plateaued. Actually, his recent opposition doesn't let us see if there has been any progression. Being honest, I don't think Canelo fights Charlo because he likes to fight smaller opponents. I was the first person Canelo fought who was the same size as him and after that, he went straight back down for Floyd (Mayweather). Now, Charlo is huge and I don't know how this boy ever makes 154 pounds. Also, I've seen the progression with him and he's getting better in every fight. I think he could outmuscle Canelo at times and he has good boxing skills. Don't get me wrong, that doesn't guarantee him a win because this is a very tough fight. The winner depends on when it happens. Right now, I'd favor Canelo in a very close fight but Charlo's got this in the future because he's the one doing all the improving.

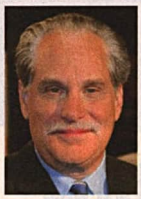
PREDICTION: Canelo

TRAINER

JOE GALLAGHER
2015 RING Trainer of the Year

There's a whole list of things when it comes to Canelo's strengths. He's very cute, he works well on the inside, he protects the body well and his hand speed is very underrated. He's just a very solid fighter all round. Both Charlo brothers are good but Jermall seems to be the better of the two. He's enjoying the sport right now and he's boxing with a smile on his face. It was a good performance against Williams and a really good uppercut. Charlo is a solid operator who doesn't leave many gaps and he's growing into his role of being a world champion now. In a fight between him and Canelo, it might come down to experience, though. Canelo has been on the big stage, in the big fights, and he's dealt with the atmosphere surrounding the likes of Miguel Cotto and Floyd Mayweather. Straight away, that gives him a psychological advantage against an opponent who would be in his very first superfight. I think Charlo causes problems early but Alvarez would catch up to him, make it his kind of fight and pull off a win in the later rounds.

PREDICTION: Canelo

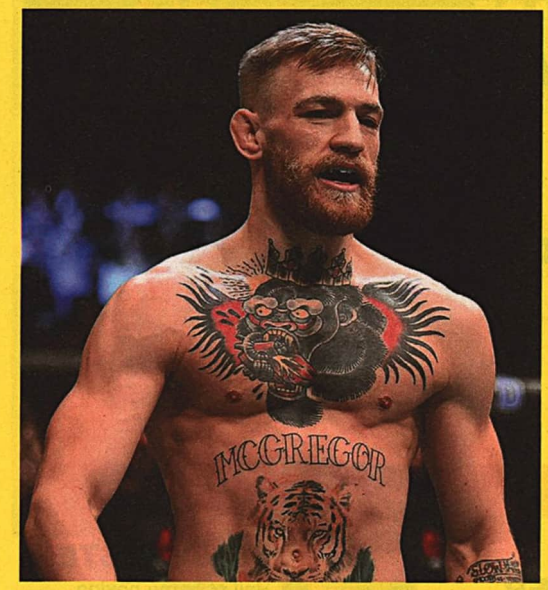


MEDIA

AL BERNSTEIN
Hall of Fame boxing analyst

Canelo is an excellent offensive fighter when the opponent doesn't give him a lot of lateral movement. He throws good combinations, he has a varied attack to the body and the head and so offensively, against someone who stands in the pocket, there are very few fighters who do as good a job as he does. Charlo is very powerful at 154 pounds and we know that because he demonstrated it against a very good fighter in Julian Williams. He carries that power in both hands and he knows how to use his height and reach effectively. Another thing that was impressive from Charlo is that he was hit by some nice power shots from Williams and took those punches very well. So, like Canelo, he has some defensive liabilities but offensively he's the real deal. Now, while Charlo doesn't use great lateral movement, he moves a bit, and that combined with his height and reach could give Canelo real problems. There is no doubt that Charlo would be able to land on him. I think they would both end up in the pocket, though, and it would be a very exciting fight. Ultimately, it's 50/50 right down the line and I'm not sure I have a pick.

PREDICTION: Undecided



Conor McGregor already has had a windfall of publicity.

'CON' MAN

A man down on his luck is an easy mark for scammers. The same must be true of sports that have fallen on hard times, as it's with no small amount of desperation that boxing has given **Conor McGregor** everything he wants.

For the past several months, news outlets have fomented the idea that McGregor – the UFC's biggest attraction – and boxing's cash-cow emeritus, **Floyd Mayweather Jr.**, are on the verge of fighting. In November, McGregor went so far as to obtain a boxing license in California (where Floyd never fights) and said in December that being a card-carrying "boxer" proved his intention of trading chain-link fences for ropes.

Always eager to participate in publicity, Mayweather, his manager **Leonard Ellerbe** and UFC president **Dana White** all did their part by promising who'd kick whose ass even while saying the fight would never happen because of a complication known as "reality."

Yet it makes perfect sense when you consider that the UFC was recently sold for $4 billion and McGregor has every reason to create the impression that he could make $100 million by taking his tattoos to the squared circle. It doesn't hurt to have it look like boxers are running from him. And if there was any doubt that brand-building was a motivation, McGregor monetized his new "crossover athlete" persona in January by starring in an ad for a high-stakes horse race, saying he intended to become the "pound-for-pound No. 1 jockey on the planet." And he didn't have to throw a single jab.

Unfortunately, the hype driving his career strategy has been sustained by a boxing business that wants to believe Mayweather-scale events are still possible, and by fighters who, in the post-Mayweather lottery era, have now seized on the McGregor lottery. Within days of the California license being granted, **Oscar De La Hoya** dropped **Canelo Alvarez's** name, **Paulie Malignaggi** dropped his own name and even **Michael Katsidis** resurfaced to say he'd fight the Irishman.

It's a little sad, but even this debasement is preferable to the possibility, however absurd, that we are witnessing the long con – the one that sets up the only payday large enough to bring Mayweather out of retirement.

Last March, **Nick Blackwell** sustained a brain injury during a fight against Chris Eubank Jr. in London, was placed in a medically induced coma, then reawakened and retired. In late November, Blackwell was again rushed to the hopsital, this time for surgery to reduce swelling on his brain after a sparring session. Yes, a sparring session – with punches aimed at his head. He was in another coma until just before Christmas but by then an investigation by the British Boxing Board of Control had already resulted in the suspensions of the sparring partner and his trainer. Blackwell's second recovery is ongoing.

In early December, Mexican junior featherweight **Alejandro Gonzalez Jr.** was found shot to death in a truck near his home in Guadalajara, along with two other men. All three were reportedly bound and the scene had the look of a cartel-style execution. Gonzalez, who was the son of former featherweight titleholder **Alejandro "La Cobrita" Gonzalez**, had been in the ring just a month earlier and in July 2015 scored two first-round knockdowns in **Carl Frampton's** U.S. debut – a fight Gonzalez eventually lost on the cards. "One of the nicest guys I've shared a ring with," tweeted Frampton after hearing the news.

A movie depicting the life of **Edwin Valero,** the undefeated boxer (27-0, 27 knockouts) who was widely viewed as a rising pound-for-pound contender when he was arrested in 2010 for the murder of his wife and committed suicide in jail, was pulled from theaters in Venezuela in December. Family members accused "El Inca" of slandering Valero, though the director, **Ignacio Castillo Cottin,** claimed the censorship was politically motivated.

Junior welterweight champion **Terence Crawford** was sentenced to 90 days in jail for his role in a reverse-repo-gone-wrong incident in April. Crawford and some friends were liberating his car from an Omaha body shop but allegedly did so forcibly and damaged a hydraulic lift in the process. He was out the next day on bail and his attorney is filing an appeal.

A court in Nevada ordered **Adrien Broner** to pay $175,000 to a woman who was one-third of a threesome Broner recorded on his phone back in 2013. The video was somehow "leaked" online but Broner said it's because his "ho phone" – not to be confused with his family phone or business phone – was lost.

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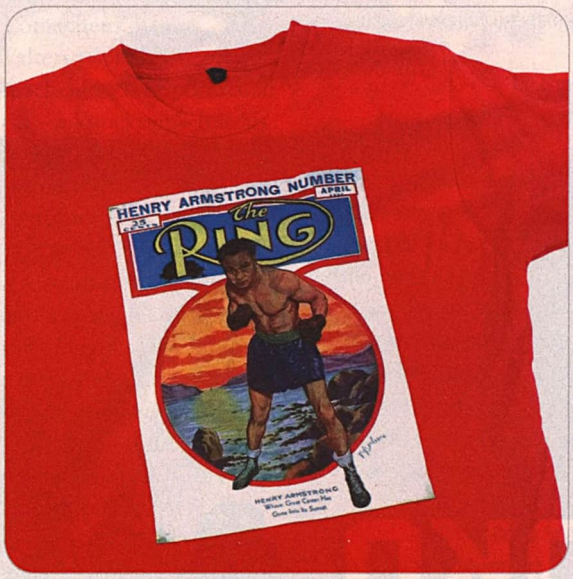

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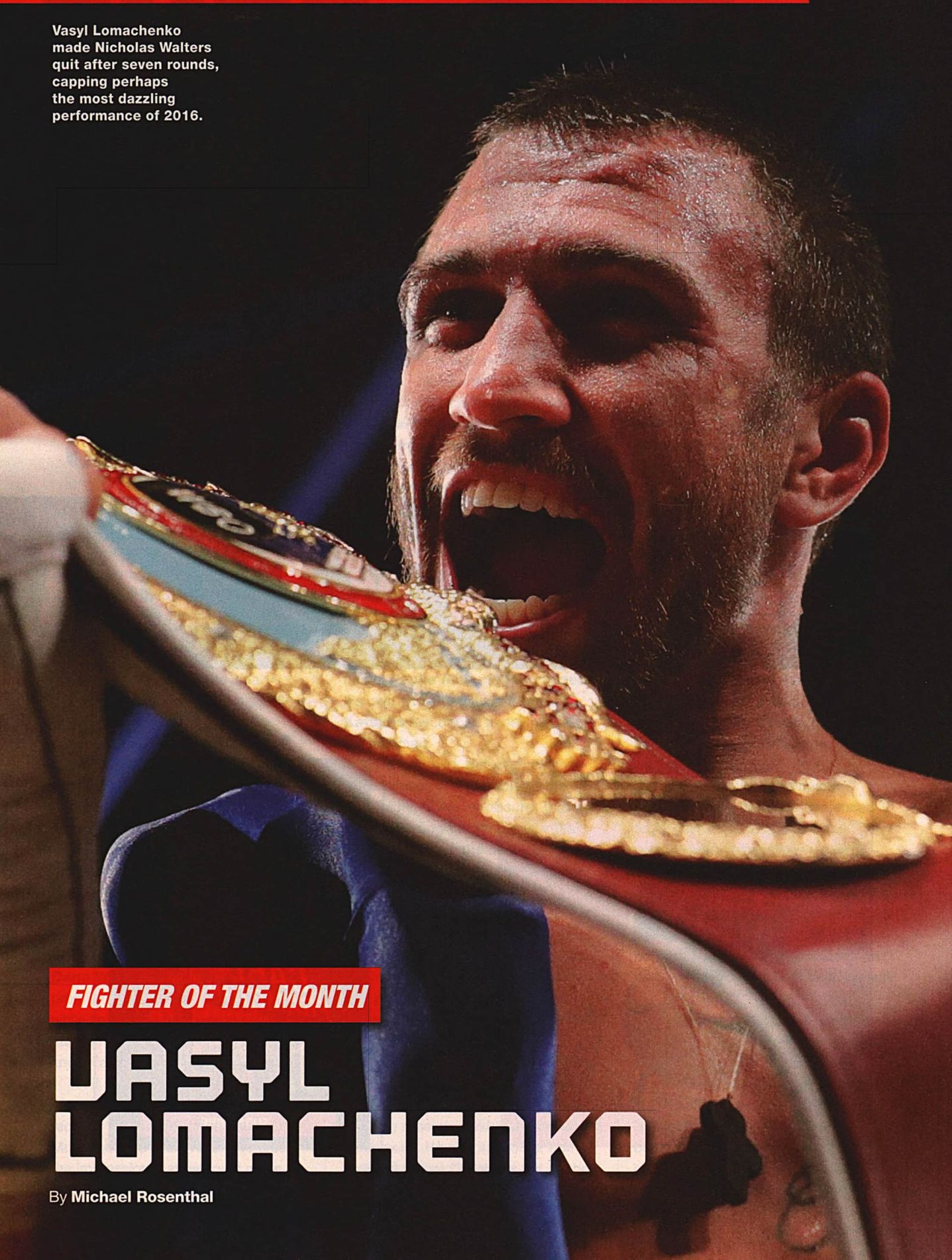


Vasyl Lomachenko made Nicholas Walters quit after seven rounds, capping perhaps the most dazzling performance of 2016.

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH

VASYL LOMACHENKO

By **Michael Rosenthal**

Yeah, Nicholas Walters hadn't fought in 11 months, a fact he pointed out immediately after his "fight" with Vasyl Lomachenko on November 26 in Las Vegas. And, OK, the Jamaican was coming off a disputed draw with Jason Sosa.

Those weren't the main talking points going into the fight, though. Walters was deemed a beast, one that had ripped Nonito Donaire apart and might test Lomachenko. Many believed it would be a competitive fight.

It wasn't.

Lomachenko dominated a very good fighter to such a point where that fighter realized his mission was hopeless and quit after seven rounds. In other words, he saved himself from further embarrassment and very likely worse.

I was struck by Walters' corner between rounds. He looked desperately at both his trainer and his father near the end, as if to ask, "What do I do?" It seems more and more that there are no answers to that question when it comes to Lomachenko.

Walters probably deprived Lomachenko of a spectacular finish – a knockout – but his statement was loud enough.

Even if you buy into Walters' contention that his inactivity played a role in his demise, it was a beautiful performance, a mesmerizing blend of pure boxing and methodical destruction that dazzled everyone who witnessed it.

Lomachenko said immediately after Walters' capitulation that his goal is to become the No. 1 pound-for-pound fighter. That's not boasting; that's very likely his destiny. RING

POUND FOR POUND: Vasyl Lomachenko (No. 7 last month) rose to No. 6 after so thoroughly befuddling Nicholas Walters (unrated) that the Jamaican chose the escape hatch and quit on his stool in Round 7.

HEAVYWEIGHTS: Bryant Jennings (No. 8 last month) was removed because of inactivity and Dillian Whyte came in at No. 10 on the heels of an entertaining victory over Dereck Chisora (unrated).

CRUISERWEIGHTS: Murat Gassiev soared from No. 10 to No. 2 after taking a belt via split decision from Denis Lebedev, who dropped from No. 1 to No. 4.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS: Cuba's Sullivan Barrera entered at No. 9 after a seventh-round knockout of Vyacheslav Shabranskyy, who went from No. 6 to No. 10. The following night, Joe Smith Jr. continued his breakout year with a dramatic knockout of Bernard Hopkins (unrated) and climbed from No. 7 to No. 6.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No changes.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Still in limbo after his first-round implosion at the hands of Daniel Jacobs, Peter Quillin (No. 7 last month) was dropped for inactivity. A spot thus opened up at No. 10 and was taken by Ryota Murata, who KO'd Bruno Sandoval (unrated) in Tokyo.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Jermall Charlo (No. 3 last month) used the presumptive Uppercut of the Year to prime Julian Williams for a fifth-round TKO. Charlo stepped up to No. 2 and Williams slipped from No. 8 to No. 10. Williams was then replaced by the unrated Michel Soro after the Frenchman dispatched Nuhu Lawal (also unrated) in 10 rounds.

WELTERWEIGHTS: No changes.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS: Straight out of the boxing hotbed of Namibia, unrated and underestimated Julius Indongo scored an upset with a first-round knockout of Eduard Troyanovsky (No. 4 last month). Troyanovsky lost his title and fell to No. 10 while Indongo came in at No. 8. Division champion Terence Crawford booted John Molina (No. 6 last month) from the list with an eighth-round stoppage, making room at No. 10 for undefeated Russian Sergey Lipinets, who knocked out Lenny Zappavigna (unrated) in Round 8.

LIGHTWEIGHTS: Denis Shafikov went from No. 7 to No. 5 after squeaking by with a split decision over Richard Commey, who went the opposite way from No. 5 to No. 7. An energized Raymundo Beltran replaced Mason Menard at No. 10 after stopping Menard in eight rounds.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS: Lomachenko's domination of Walters (unrated) lifted him from No. 3 to No. 1. Philadelphia's Tevin Farmer was brought in at No. 10, replacing Saul Rodriguez, after building on his resume with a 10-round wipeout of Dardan Zenunaj (unrated). In Tokyo, Jezreel Corrales successfully defended his title against Takashi Uchiyama again, this time by split decision rather than quick knockout. As a result, Corrales went from No. 5 to No. 4 and Uchiyama dropped from No. 6 to No. 7.

FEATHERWEIGHTS: Abner Mares stayed put at No. 5 but knocked Jesus Cuellar from No. 7 to No. 9 with an oddly split decision in Los Angeles.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS: Hozumi Hasegawa (No. 7) retired and Scott Quigg (No. 2) moved up in weight, so the list got a couple new faces in Hugo Ruiz (in at No. 9) and Cesar Juarez (No. 10), both from Mexico. Veteran Nehomar Cermeno then briefly replaced Juarez after scoring a third-straight victory in China, this one a unanimous decision over XiaoJun Qiu (unrated). Cermeno himself was ousted after Yukinori Oguni entered at No. 9 after upsetting titleholder Jonathan Guzman, who fell from No. 6 to No. 10.

BANTAMWEIGHTS: No changes.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS: Luis Concepcion lost his title and slipped from No. 5 to No. 8 after losing a very wide decision to Khalid Yafai, who was promoted from No. 7 to No. 6. Kohei Kono dropped from No. 7 to No. 10 after succumbing to No. 1-rated Naoya Inoue in Round 6.

FLYWEIGHTS: No changes.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS: Javier Mendoza (No. 5 last month) moved up to 112, so he was removed and Japanese youngster Ken Shiro took the opening at No. 10. Kicking off a division shuffle on Dec. 30, Akira Yaegashi rose from No. 4 to No. 2 after a final-round stoppage of unrated Samartlek Kokietgym. The facelift continued with two more title fights on New Year's Eve in Japan: Ryoichi Taguchi fell from No. 1 to No. 5 with Venezuelan newcomer Carlos Canizales installed one notch below him after the pair fought to a draw, and 21-year-old Kosei Tanaka stormed in at No. 4 after stopping Moises Fuentes (No. 9 at the time) in five rounds. Fuentes dropped out.

STRAWWEIGHTS: No changes.

Jermall Charlo (left) made a loud statement by stopping Julian Williams.

THE FIGURES UNDER THE FIGHTERS' NAMES INDICATE: WEEKS IN THE RATINGS • COUNTRY • RECORD

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C TYSON FURY
255 • U.K. • 25-0-0 (18 KOs)

1. **WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO**
607 • Ukraine • 64-4-0 (53 KOs)
2. **DEONTAY WILDER**
163 • U.S. • 37-0-0 (36 KOs)
3. **KUBRAT PULEV**
273 • Bulgaria • 24-1-0 (13 KOs)
4. **LUIS ORTIZ**
55 • Cuba • 27-0-0 (23 KOs)
5. **ANTHONY JOSHUA**
62 • U.K. • 18-0-0 (18 KOs)
6. **JOSEPH PARKER**
39 • New Zealand • 22-0-0 (18 KOs)
7. **BERMANE STIVERNE**
193 • Canada • 25-2-1 (21 KOs)
8. **DAVID HAYE**
34 • U.K. • 28-2-0 (26 KOs)
9. **ANDY RUIZ JR.**
31 • Mexico • 29-1-0 (19 KOs)
10. **DILLIAN WHYTE**
3 • U.K. • 20-1-0 (15 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. **OLEKSANDR USYK**
66 • Ukraine • 11-0-0 (10 KOs)
2. **MURAT GASSIEV**
8 • Russia • 24-0-0 (17 KOs)
3. **TONY BELLEW**
33 • U.K. • 28-2-1 (18 KOs)
4. **DENIS LEBEDEV**
362 • Russia • 29-3-0 (22 KOs)
5. **KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI**
73 • Poland • 26-1-0 (16 KOs)
6. **MARCO HUCK**
252 • Germany • 40-3-1 (27 KOs)
7. **MAIRIS BRIEDIS**
45 • Latvia • 21-0-0 (18 KOs)
8. **FIRAT ARSLAN**
218 • Germany • 38-8-2 (23 KOs)
9. **ILUNGA MAKABU**
182 • Congo • 19-2-0 (18 KOs)
10. **YUNIER DORTICOS**
33 • Cuba • 21-0-0 (20 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. **ANDRE WARD**
41 • U.S. • 31-0-0 (15 KOs)
2. **SERGEY KOVALEV**
207 • Russia • 30-1-1 (26 KOs)
3. **ADONIS STEVENSON**
187 • Canada • 28-1-0 (23 KOs)
4. **ELEIDER ALVAREZ**
147 • Colombia • 21-0-0 (10 KOs)
5. **ARTUR BETERBIEV**
108 • Russia • 11-0-0 (11 KOs)
6. **JOE SMITH JR.**
29 • U.S. • 23-1-0 (19 KOs)
7. **NATHAN CLEVERLY**
14 • U.K. • 30-3-0 (16 KOs)
8. **OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK**
7 • Ukraine • 12-0-0 (10 KOs)
9. **SULLIVAN BARRERA**
3 • Cuba • 18-1-0 (13 KOs)
10. **VYACHESLAV SHABRANSKYY**
55 • Ukraine • 17-1-0 (14 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. **JAMES DEGALE**
187 • U.K. • 23-1-0 (14 KOs)
2. **BADOU JACK**
89 • Sweden • 20-1-2 (12 KOs)
3. **GILBERTO RAMIREZ**
130 • Mexico • 34-0-0 (24 KOs)
4. **GEORGE GROVES**
265 • U.K. • 25-3-0 (18 KOs)
5. **ANDRE DIRRELL**
123 • U.S. • 25-2-0 (16 KOs)
6. **CALLUM SMITH**
83 • U.K. • 22-0-0 (17 KOs)
7. **ANTHONY DIRRELL**
125 • U.S. • 29-1-1 (23 KOs)
8. **ARTHUR ABRAHAM**
378 • Armenia • 45-5-0 (30 KOs)
9. **FEDOR CHUDINOV**
87 • Russia • 14-1-0 (10 KOs)
10. **TYRON ZEUGE**
8 • Germany • 19-0-1 (11 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 LBS

C CANELO ALVAREZ
59 • Mexico • 48-1-1 (34 KOs)

1. GENNADY GOLOVKIN
265 • Kaz. • 36-0-0 (33 KOs)

2. DANIEL JACOBS
108 • U.S. • 32-1-0 (29 KOs)

3. BILLY JOE SAUNDERS
110 • U.K. • 24-0-0 (12 KOs)

4. DAVID LEMIEUX
84 • Canada • 36-3-0 (32 KOs)

5. ANDY LEE
108 • Ireland • 34-3-1 (24 KOs)

6. CHRIS EUBANK JR.
91 • U.K. • 23-1-0 (18 KOs)

7. HASSAN N'DAM
155 • Cameroon • 35-2-0 (21 KOs)

8. AVTANDIL KHURTSIDZE
44 • Georgia • 32-2-2 (21 KOs)

9. MACIEJ SULECKI
27 • Poland • 23-0-0 (8 KOs)

10. RYOTA MURATA
1 • Japan • 12-0-0 (9 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. CANELO ALVAREZ
16 • Mexico • 48-1-1 (34 KOs)

2. JERMALL CHARLO
134 • U.S. • 25-0-0 (19 KOs)

3. ERISLANDY LARA
288 • Cuba • 23-2-2 (13 KOs)

4. MIGUEL COTTO
59 • P.R. • 40-5-0 (33 KOs)

5. JERMELL CHARLO
165 • U.S. • 28-0-0 (13 KOs)

6. DEMETRIUS ANDRADE
64 • U.S. • 23-0-0 (16 KOs)

7. AUSTIN TROUT
240 • U.S. • 30-3-0 (17 KOs)

8. LIAM SMITH
69 • U.K. • 23-1-1 (13 KOs)

9. JARRETT HURD
8 • U.S. • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)

10. MICHEL SORO
3 • France • 29-1-1 (19 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. KELL BROOK
298 • U.K. • 36-1-0 (25 KOs)

2. KEITH THURMAN
200 • U.S. • 27-0-0 (22 KOs)

3. SHAWN PORTER
161 • U.S. • 26-2-1 (16 KOs)

4. MANNY PACQUIAO
9 • Phil. • 59-6-2 (38 KOs)

5. TIM BRADLEY
239 • U.S. • 33-2-1 (13 KOs)

6. AMIR KHAN
140 • U.K. • 31-4-0 (19 KOs)

7. DANNY GARCIA
75 • U.S. • 33-0-0 (19 KOs)

8. ERROL SPENCE
66 • U.S. • 21-0-0 (18 KOs)

9. JESSIE VARGAS
44 • U.S. • 27-2-0 (10 KOs)

10. KONSTANTIN PONOMAREV
39 • Ukraine • 31-0-0 (13 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 LBS

C TERENCE CRAWFORD
90 • U.S. • 30-0-0 (21 KOs)

1. VIKTOR POSTOL
177 • Ukraine • 28-1-0 (12 KOs)

2. ADRIEN BRONER
140 • U.S. • 32-2-0 (24 KOs)

3. ANTONIO OROZCO
66 • U.S. • 25-0-0 (16 KOs)

4. ADRIAN GRANADOS
44 • U.S. • 18-4-2 (12 KOs)

5. RICKY BURNS
32 • U.K. • 41-5-1 (14 KOs)

6. REGIS PROGRAIS
24 • U.S. • 18-0-0 (15 KOs)

7. JULIUS INDONGO
5 • Namibia • 21-0-0 (11 KOs)

8. JACK CATTERALL
41 • U.K. • 17-0-0 (9 KOs)

9. EDUARD TROYANOVSKY
58 • Russia • 25-1-0 (22 KOs)

10. SERGEY LIPINETS
4 • Russia • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 LBS

C JORGE LINARES
148 • Venezuela • 41-3-0 (27 KOs)

1. DEJAN ZLATICANIN
91 • Montenegro • 22-0-0 (15 KOs)

2. TERRY FLANAGAN
65 • U.K. • 32-0-0 (13 KOs)

3. ROBERT EASTER
40 • U.S. • 18-0-0 (14 KOs)

4. ANTHONY CROLLA
63 • U.K. • 31-5-3 (13 KOs)

5. DENIS SHAFIKOV
91 • Russia • 38-2-1 (20 KOs)

6. SHARIF BOGERE
114 • Uganda • 29-1-0 (20 KOs)

7. RICHARD COMMEY
84 • Ghana • 24-2-0 (22 KOs)

8. FELIX VERDEJO
38 • Puerto Rico • 22-0-0 (15 KOs)

9. PETR PETROV
15 • Russia • 38-4-2 (19 KOs)

10. RAYMUNDO BELTRAN
4 • Mexico • 32-7-1 (20 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. VASYL LOMACHENKO
30 • Ukraine • 7-1-0 (5 KOs)

2. FRANCISCO VARGAS
130 • Mexico • 23-0-2 (17 KOs)

3. ORLANDO SALIDO
120 • Mexico • 43-13-4 (30 KOs)

4. JEZREEL CORRALES
36 • Panama • 21-1-0 (8 KOs)

5. TAKASHI MIURA
196 • Japan • 30-3-2 (23 KOs)

6. JOSE PEDRAZA
103 • P.R. • 22-0-0 (12 KOs)

7. TAKASHI UCHIYAMA
366 • Japan • 24-2-1 (20 KOs)

8. ROMAN MARTINEZ
435 • P.R. • 29-3-3 (17 KOs)

9. JASON SOSA
28 • U.S. • 20-1-4 (15 KOs)

10. TEVIN FARMER
5 • U.S. • 24-4-1 (5 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. GARY RUSSELL JR.
93 • U.S. • 27-1-0 (16 KOs)

2. CARL FRAMPTON
23 • U.K. • 23-0-0 (14 KOs)

3. LEE SELBY
147 • U.K. • 23-1-0 (8 KOs)

4. LEO SANTA CRUZ
71 • U.S. • 32-1-1 (18 KOs)

5. ABNER MARES
192 • Mexico • 30-2-1 (15 KOs)

6. SIMPIWE VETYEKA
161 • S. Africa • 29-3-0 (17 KOs)

7. OSCAR VALDEZ
39 • Mexico • 21-0-0 (19 KOs)

8. JOSEPH DIAZ JR.
41 • U.S. • 23-0-0 (13 KOs)

9. JESUS CUELLAR
117 • Argentina • 28-2-0 (21 KOs)

10. JORGE LARA
13 • Mexico • 28-0-2 (20 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX
322 • Cuba • 17-0-0 (11 KOs)

2. JESSIE MAGDALENO
82 • U.S. • 24-0-0 (17 KOs)

3. GENESIS SERVANIA
147 • Phil. • 28-0-0 (11 KOs)

4. REY VARGAS
108 • Mexico • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)

5. NONITO DONAIRE
93 • Phil. • 37-4-0 (24 KOs)

6. MOISES FLORES
26 • Mexico • 25-0-0 (17 KOs)

7. DIEGO DE LA HOYA
23 • Mexico • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)

8. HUGO RUIZ
4 • Mexico • 36-4-0 (32 KOs)

9. YUKINORI OGUNI
1 • Japan • 19-1-1 (7 KOs)

10. JONATHAN GUZMAN
24 • Dom. Rep. • 22-1-0 (22 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. THE RING'S Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the RING title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his champion weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

THE RING Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

Records provided by boxrec.com

RING RATINGS

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 LBS

C SHINSUKE YAMANAKA
270 • Japan • 26-0-2 (18 KOs)

1. JAMIE MCDONNELL
192 • U.K. • 29-2-1 (13 KOs)

2. RAU'SHEE WARREN
28 • U.S. • 14-1-0 (4 KOs)

3. JUAN CARLOS PAYANO
119 • Dom. Rep. • 17-1-0 (8 KOs)

4. LEE HASKINS
82 • U.K. • 34-3-0 (14 KOs)

5. ANSELMO MORENO
458 • Panama • 36-5-1 (12 KOs)

6. MARLON TAPALES
55 • Phil. • 29-2-0 (12 KOs)

7. TOMOKI KAMEDA
179 • Japan • 32-2-0 (20 KOs)

8. ZOLANI TETE
43 • S. Africa • 24-3-0 (20 KOs)

9. LUIS NERY
23 • Mexico • 22-0-0 (16 KOs)

10. LIBORIO SOLIS
8 • Venezuela • 25-5-1 (11 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. NAOYA INOUE
105 • Japan • 12-0-0 (10 KOs)

2. ROMAN GONZALEZ
17 • Nicaragua • 46-0-0 (38 KOs)

3. CARLOS CUADRAS
241 • Mexico • 35-1-1 (27 KOs)

4. SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI
192 • Thailand • 41-4-1 (38 KOs)

5. JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA
13 • Mexico • 34-2-0 (24 KOs)

6. KHALID YAFAI
43 • U.K. • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)

7. LUIS CONCEPCION
68 • Panama • 35-5-0 (24 KOs)

8. JERWIN ANCAJAS
18 • Phil. • 25-1-1 (16 KOs)

9. MCJOE ARROYO
134 • P.R. • 17-1-0 (8 KOs)

10. KOHEI KONO
64 • Japan • 32-10-1 (13 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. KAZUTO IOKA
121 • Japan • 21-1-0 (13 KOs)

2. JOHNRIEL CASIMERO
65 • Phil. • 23-3-0 (15 KOs)

3. DONNIE NIETES
15 • Phil. • 39-1-4 (22 KOs)

4. MORUTI MTHALANE
147 • S. Africa • 32-2-0 (21 KOs)

5. AMNAT RUENROENG
139 • Thailand • 17-1-0 (5 KOs)

6. JUAN CARLOS REVECO
275 • Argentina • 37-3-0 (19 KOs)

7. MCWILLIAMS ARROYO
122 • P.R. • 16-3-0 (14 KOs)

8. NAWAPHON POR CHOKCHAI
80 • Thailand • 36-0-0 (28 KOs)

9. ZOU SHIMING
9 • China • 9-1-0 (2 KOs)

10. DAIGO HIGA
14 • Japan • 11-0-0 (11 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. PEDRO GUEVARA
197 • Mexico • 29-2-1 (17 KOs)

2. AKIRA YAEGASHI
53 • Japan • 25-5-0 (13 KOs)

3. GANIGAN LOPEZ
44 • Mexico • 28-6-0 (17 KOs)

4. KOSEI TANAKA
1 • Japan • 8-0-0 (5 KOs)

5. RYOICHI TAGUCHI
108 • Japan • 25-2-2 (11 KOs)

6. CARLOS CANIZALES
1 • Venezuela • 16-0-1 (13 KOs)

7. RANDY PETALCORIN
139 • Phil. • 25-2-1 (18 KOs)

8. MILAN MELINDO
112 • Phil. • 35-2-0 (12 KOs)

9. HEKKIE BUDLER
11 • S. Africa • 30-2-0 (9 KOs)

10. KEN SHIRO
6 • Japan • 9-0-0 (5 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. WANHENG MENAYOTHIN
290 • Thailand • 44-0-0 (17 KOs)

2. KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART
118 • Thailand • 14-0-0 (6 KOs)

3. BYRON ROJAS
42 • Nicaragua • 18-3-3 (8 KOs)

4. JOSE ARGUMEDO
53 • Mexico • 19-3-1 (11 KOs)

5. KATSUNARI TAKAYAMA
197 • Japan • 31-8-0 (12 KOs)

6. CARLOS BUITRAGO
221 • Nicaragua • 30-2-1 (17 KOs)

7. RIKU KANO
32 • Japan • 11-2-1 (6 KOs)

8. SIMPHIWE KHONCO
11 • S. Africa • 17-5-0 (7 KOs)

9. SAUL JUAREZ
26 • Mexico • 23-5-1 (12 KOs)

10. RYUYA YAMANAKA
8 • Japan • 13-2-0 (3 KOs)

POUND FOR POUND

1. ROMAN GONZALEZ
135 • Nicaragua • 46-0-0 (38 KOs)

2. ANDRE WARD
69 • U.S. • 31-0-0 (15 KOs)

3. SERGEY KOVALEV
95 • Russia • 30-1-1 (26 KOs)

4. GENNADY GOLOVKIN
99 • Kazakhstan • 36-0-0 (33 KOs)

5. TERENCE CRAWFORD
88 • U.S. • 30-0-0 (21 KOs)

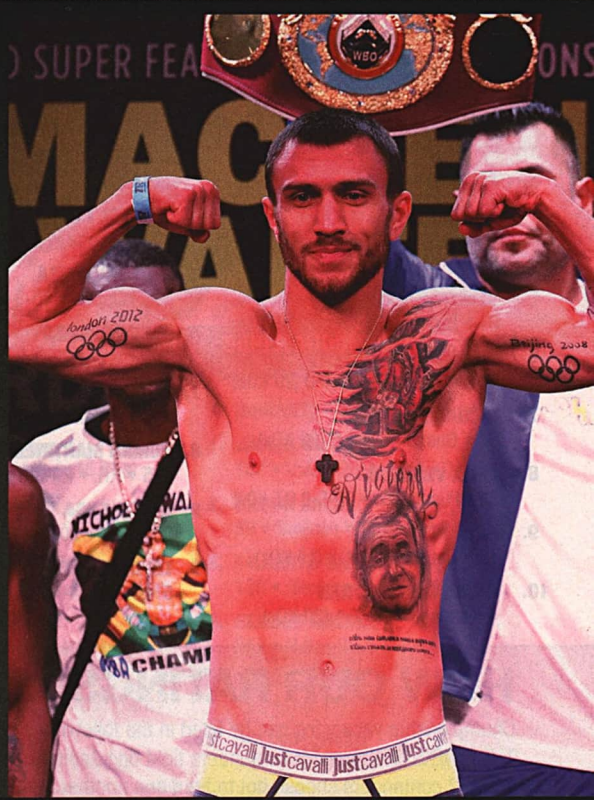
6. VASYL LOMACHENKO
30 • Ukraine • 7-1-0 (5 KO)

7. GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX
176 • Cuba • 17-0-0 (11 KOs)

8. CANELO ALVAREZ
59 • Mexico • 48-1-1 (34 KOs)

9. SHINSUKE YAMANAKA
86 • Japan • 26-0-2 (18 KOs)

10. CARL FRAMPTON
23 • U.K. • 23-0-0 (14 KOs)



THE RING POLICY ON RATED BOXERS WHO TEST POSITIVE FOR PERFORMANCE-ENHANCING DRUGS

THE RING will remove from its ratings any rated boxer — including a champion — if such boxer at some point undergoes drug testing (Olympic-style or otherwise) and that boxer tests positive for a performance-enhancing drug.

In the event that a boxer has undergone testing in which the boxer provides two samples ("A" and "B") and the boxer's "A" and subsequent "B" samples test positive for a performance-enhancing drug or if his "A" sample tests positive and he waives his right to have the "B" sample tested then the boxer shall immediately be removed from the ratings.

A boxer whose "A" sample tested positive and is awaiting the results of his "B" sample will not be allowed to fight for a championship or rise in the ratings.

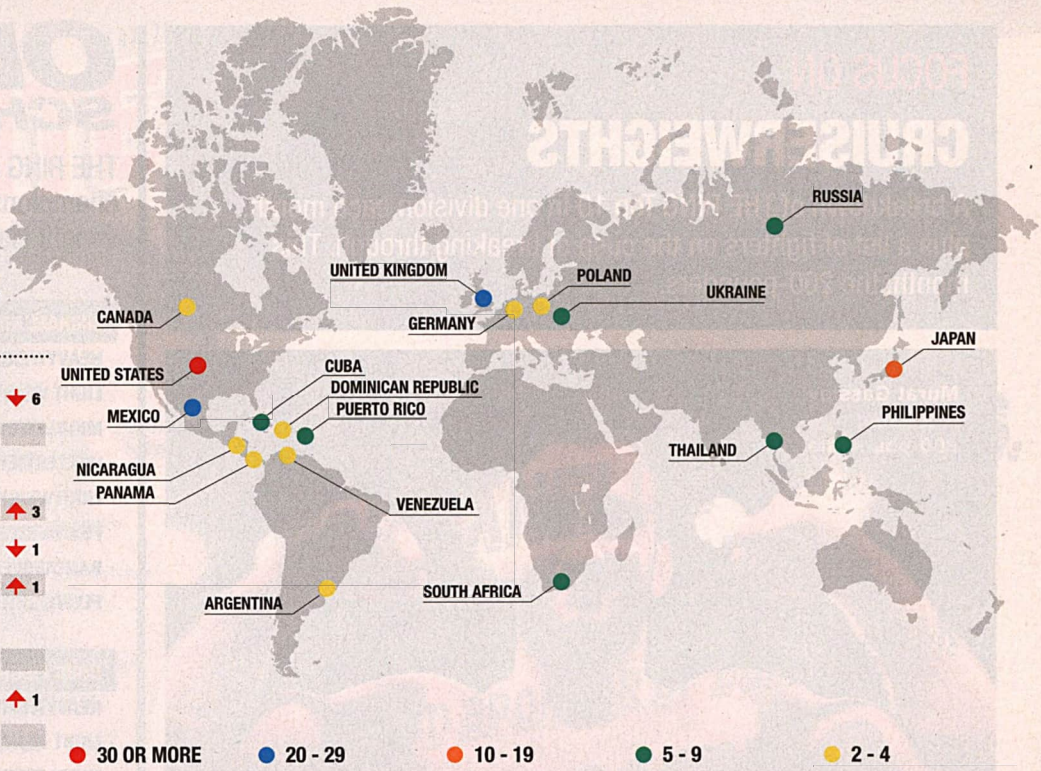
A boxer who is removed because of a positive test will have the opportunity to earn his way back into the ratings after any suspension period is completed.

A boxer who is dropped also may be reinstated if the testing agency subsequently reverses its decision or a court of competent jurisdiction finds that the test result was invalid.

RATED FIGHTERS BY COUNTRY

●	UNITED STATES	30	▼ 6
●	UNITED KINGDOM	23	
●	MEXICO	21	
●	JAPAN	17	▲ 3
●	PHILIPPINES	9	▼ 1
●	RUSSIA	9	▲ 1
●	UKRAINE	7	
●	PUERTO RICO	6	
●	CUBA	5	▲ 1
●	SOUTH AFRICA	5	
●	THAILAND	5	
●	CANADA	3	
●	GERMANY	3	
●	NICARAGUA	3	
●	PANAMA	3	
●	VENEZUELA	3	▲ 1
●	ARGENTINA	2	
●	DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	2	
●	POLAND	2	
●	ARMENIA	1	
●	BULGARIA	1	
●	CAMEROON	1	
●	CHINA	1	
●	COLOMBIA	1	
●	CONGO	1	
●	FRANCE	1	▲ 1
●	GEORGIA	1	
●	GHANA	1	
●	IRELAND	1	
●	KAZAKHSTAN	1	
●	LATVIA	1	
●	MONTENEGRO	1	
●	NAMIBIA	1	▲ 1
●	NEW ZEALAND	1	
●	SWEDEN	1	
●	UGANDA	1	

Countries out (from last month): *Malawi* • ***Countries in:*** *France and Namibia*



U.S. VS. U.K. AND MEXICO

The Americans had one of their worst months in recent memory, as the number of rated fighters from the U.S. dropped from 36 to 30. They lost seven (Bryant Jennings, Mason Menard, John Molina, Peter Quillin, Jose Ramirez, Saul Rodriguez and Julian Williams) and gained one (Tevin Farmer). The U.S. still has a substantial lead over the U.K. (with 23) and Mexico (21) but the latter two suddenly seem to be within striking distance of the top spot.

DIVISION	U.S.	U.K.	MEXICO
HEAVYWEIGHTS	1	4	1
CRUISERWEIGHTS	0	1	0
LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS	2	1	0
SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS	2	3	1
MIDDLEWEIGHTS	1	2	1
JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS	5	1	1
WELTERWEIGHTS	6	2	0
JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS	5	2	0
LIGHTWEIGHTS	1	2	1
JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS	2	0	2
FEATHERWEIGHTS	3	2	3
JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS	1	0	4
BANTAMWEIGHTS	1	2	1
JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS	0	1	2
FLYWEIGHTS	0	0	0
JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS	0	0	2
STRAWWEIGHTS	0	0	2
TOTAL	30	23	21

FAMILIAR NAMES

Wladimir Klitschko has been rated in his division far longer than any other fighter has, roughly 11½ years. Here are the fighters who have been rated the longest period of time in a particular weight class (in weeks):

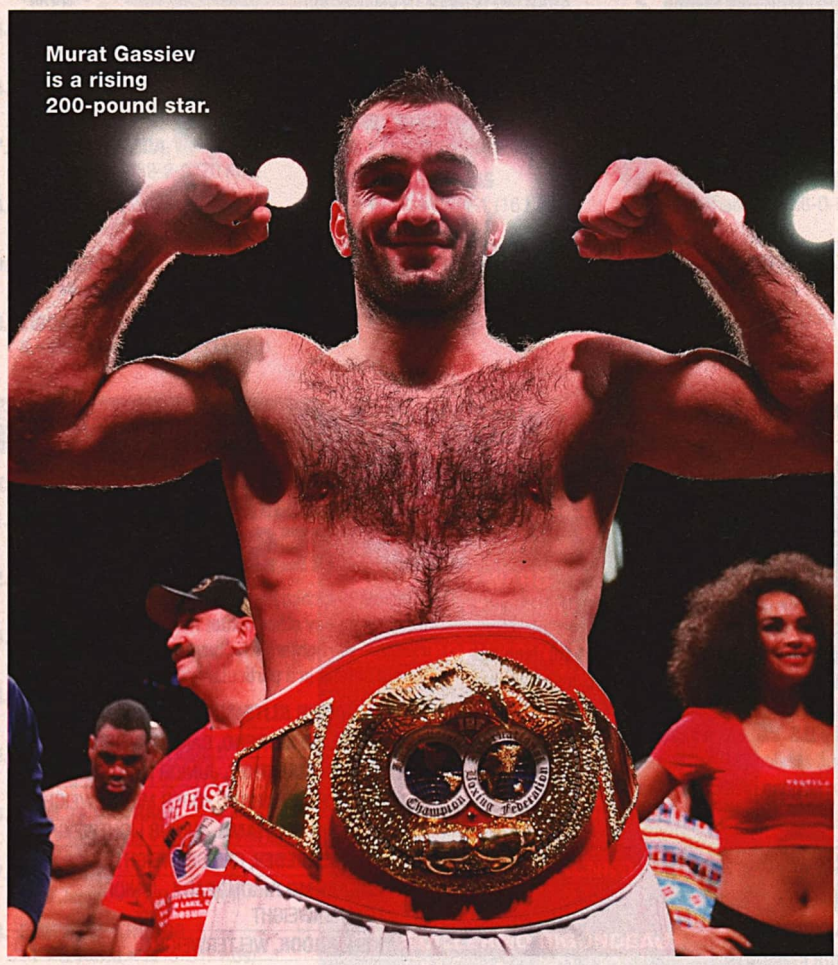
607	**WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO,** HEAVYWEIGHT
458	**ANSELMO MORENO,** BANTAMWEIGHT
435	**ROMAN MARTINEZ,** JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHT
378	**ARTHUR ABRAHAM,** SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT
366	**TAKASHI UCHIYAMA,** JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHT
362	**DENIS LEBEDEV,** CRUISERWEIGHT
322	**GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX,** JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHT
298	**KELL BROOK,** WELTERWEIGHT
290	**WANHENG MENAYOTHIN,** STRAWWEIGHT
288	**ERISLANDY LARA,** JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHT
275	**JUAN CARLOS REVECO,** FLYWEIGHT
273	**KUBRAT PULEV,** HEAVYWEIGHT
270	**SHINSUKE YAMANAKA,** BANTAMWEIGHT
265	**GENNADY GOLOVKIN,** MIDDLEWEIGHT
265	**GEORGE GROVES,** SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT
255	**TYSON FURY,** HEAVYWEIGHT
252	**MARCO HUCK,** CRUISERWEIGHT
241	**CARLOS CUADRAS,** JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHT
240	**AUSTIN TROUT,** JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHT
239	**TIM BRADLEY,** WELTERWEIGHT
221	**CARLOS BUITRAGO,** STRAWWEIGHT
218	**FIRAT ARSLAN,** CRUISERWEIGHT
207	**SERGEY KOVALEV,** LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT
200	**KEITH THURMAN,** WELTERWEIGHT

Note: *Canelo Alvarez is included twice here because he is rated in two divisions.*

FOCUS ON . . .

CRUISERWEIGHTS

A breakdown of THE RING Top 10 in one division each month, plus a list of fighters on the cusp of breaking through. This month: the 200-pounders.



Murat Gassiev is a rising 200-pound star.

MOST WEEKS RATED: DENIS LEBEDEV **362**

FEWEST WEEKS RATED: MURAT GASSIEV **8**

OLDEST: FIRAT ARSLAN **46**

YOUNGEST: GASSIEV **23**

MOST FIGHTS: ARSLAN **48**

FEWEST FIGHTS: OLEKSANDR USYK **11**

HIGHEST WINNING PERCENTAGE: MAIRIS BRIEDIS, YUNIER DORTICOS, GASSIEV, USYK **100 PERCENT**

LOWEST WINNING PERCENTAGE: ARSLAN **79.2 PERCENT**

MOST KOS: MARCO HUCK **27**

FEWEST KOS: USYK **10**

LONGEST CURRENT WINNING STREAK: GASSIEV **24 FIGHTS**

ON THE POUND-FOR-POUND LIST: NONE

TITLEHOLDERS IN THE TOP 10: BELLEW (WBC), GASSIEV (IBF), LEBEDEV (WBA), USYK (WBO)

ON THE CUSP (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER): OLANREWAJU DURODOLA, NOEL GEVOR, YOURI KALENGA, BEIBUT SHUMENOV, MAKSIM VLASOV

OLD SCHOOL 8

THE RING staff members' current champions in the original eight weight classes.

MICHAEL ROSENTHAL RING MAGAZINE EDITOR

HEAVYWEIGHT: TYSON FURY
LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT: ANDRE WARD
MIDDLEWEIGHT: GENNADY GOLOVKIN
WELTERWEIGHT: TERENCE CRAWFORD
LIGHTWEIGHT: VASYL LOMACHENKO
FEATHERWEIGHT: GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX
BANTAMWEIGHT: ROMAN GONZALEZ
FLYWEIGHT: KAZUTO IOKA

DOUG FISCHER RINGTV.COM EDITOR

HEAVYWEIGHT: TYSON FURY
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BRIAN HARTY RING MAGAZINE MANAGING EDITOR

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LIGHTWEIGHT: VASYL LOMACHENKO
FEATHERWEIGHT: CARL FRAMPTON
BANTAMWEIGHT: SHINSUKE YAMANAKA
FLYWEIGHT: DONNIE NIETES

MITCH ABRAMSON STAFF WRITER

HEAVYWEIGHT: DEONTAY WILDER
LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT: ANDRE WARD
MIDDLEWEIGHT: GENNADY GOLOVKIN
WELTERWEIGHT: KELL BROOK
LIGHTWEIGHT: VASYL LOMACHENKO
FEATHERWEIGHT: CARL FRAMPTON
BANTAMWEIGHT: SHINSUKE YAMANAKA
FLYWEIGHT: KAZUTO IOKA

Note: *This is how the weights break down: Heavyweight includes cruiserweight, light heavyweight includes super middleweight, all divisions middleweight through flyweight include the "junior" versions, and flyweight also includes strawweight.*

RICH SCHULTZ

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THE BEST OF 2016

THE 88TH ANNUAL RING AWARDS

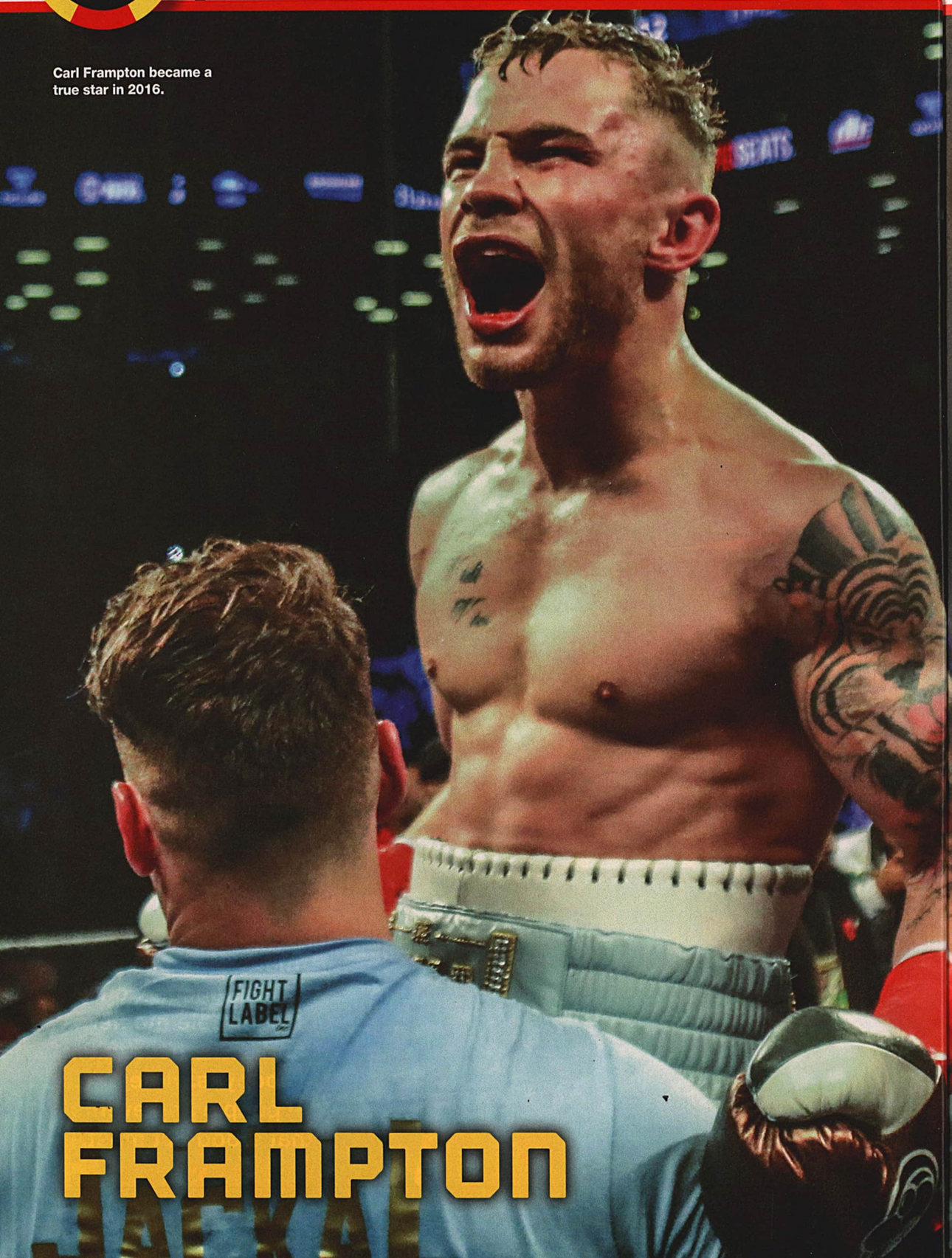
The past year provided many outstanding performances, some unforgettable moments and some heartfelt goodbyes. Here are the people and events that stood out most.

»

THE BEST OF 2016

FIGHTER OF THE YEAR

BY MICHAEL ROSENTHAL



Carl Frampton became a true star in 2016.

CARL FRAMPTON

JACKAL

FRAMPTON: ANDY SAMUELSON; CRAWFORD: MIKEY WILLIAMS

Those who have followed the career of Carl Frampton have known for years that he's a special talent.

The athleticism, the speed, the power, the unusual skillset. He seemed to be a natural from the beginning. All the fighter from Northern Ireland needed were the truly elite opponents to demonstrate exactly how good he is.

That came in 2016.

Frampton in the past year took part in two extremely risky fights and emerged with decisive victories each time, which marked his arrival as a true star.

He started his campaign by doing what precious few fighters do these days: He gave fans in the United Kingdom exactly what they wanted, a showdown with English rival Scott Quigg at the Manchester Arena.

The venue is a short drive from Quigg's hometown of Bury but, in a testament to Frampton's popularity, his vociferous fans made it seem as if the fight took place in Belfast.

The bout disappointed those who were hoping for a memorable brawl but Frampton pleased his fans, outboxing Quigg – and breaking his jaw – to win a split decision that almost everyone believed should've been unanimous.

Frampton unified two junior featherweight titles in the biggest victory of his career. And he was just getting started.

The new champ would've been justified had he chosen to catch his breath by following the victory over Quigg with a relatively easy fight but that's not how he thinks. Instead, he agreed to move up to 126 and face the swarming – and also unbeaten – Leo Santa Cruz on July 30 in Brooklyn.

Could Frampton handle Santa Cruz's size? Could he handle his punch output? Could he handle the moment?

Yes, yes and yes.

Santa Cruz was Santa Cruz, throwing a high volume of punches from beginning to end, but he couldn't cope with Frampton's speed, precision and overall ability and lost a majority decision that also should've been unanimous.

The victory gave Frampton a title in a second weight division. More important, it removed any doubt as to whether he is among the best pound-for-pound fighters in the world. He is.

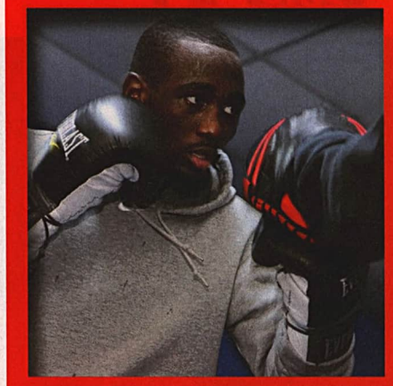
Two very big fights, two very big victories.

And as if that wasn't enough, Frampton demonstrated one more time in 2016 the supreme confidence he has in himself: He agreed to fight Santa Cruz again on January 28, this time in Las Vegas.

"I hope to get three fights in 2017," Frampton said, "so it could be a huge year for me."

It will be difficult to top 2016, when he earned RING Fighter of the Year honors. ★

RUNNERS UP



TERENCE CRAWFORD

Crawford remained one of the hottest fighters on the planet with three more impressive victories, including a unanimous-decision wipeout over then-unbeaten Viktor Postol in what some saw as a 50-50 fight. Crawford also beat Hank Lundy and John Molina.

ROMAN GONZALEZ

The current pound-for-pound king had another good year. He nearly shut out an overwhelmed McWilliams Arroyo and then moved up in weight to face talented titleholder Carlos Cuadras. Gonzalez had to work hard but emerged with a major belt in a fourth weight class.

VASYL LOMACHENKO

No one dazzled fans in 2016 more than the gifted Ukrainian, who remained on his impressive run by stopping Roman Martinez and Nicholas Walters in five and seven rounds, respectively. The imposing Walters was so baffled, so frustrated, so beaten down, that he simply quit.

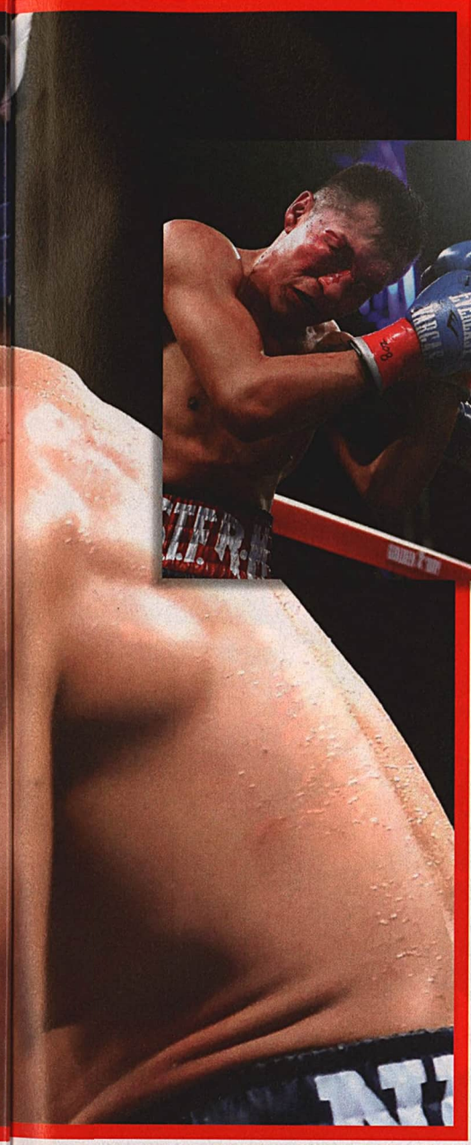
MANNY PACQUIAO

Pacquiao isn't the fighter he once was but he is still getting good results. The eight-division titleholder bounced back from his loss to Floyd Mayweather Jr. in 2015 by outpointing Tim Bradley in their third fight and doing the same against Jessie Vargas seven months later.

FIGHT OF THE YEAR

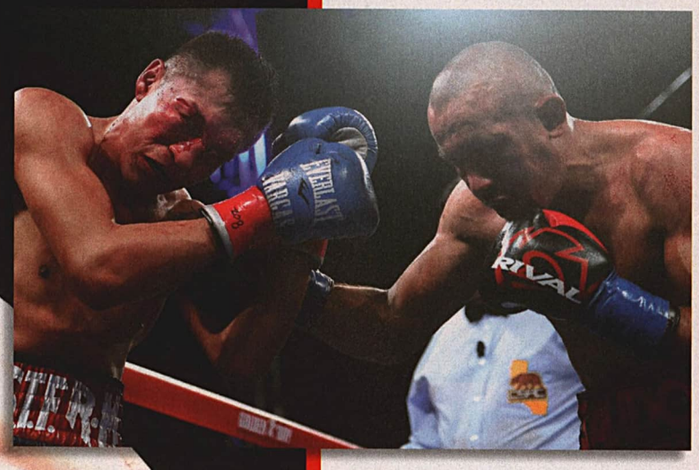
BY BRIAN HARTY

FRANCISCO VARGAS D 12 ORLANDO SALIDO



NAOKI FUKUDA

Orlando Salido (shaved head) and Francisco Vargas gave us a gem.



Nobody likes a draw.

For fighters, the draw is almost vindictive in the way it ruins perfect records. It ignores the blood invested in having just one more punch or one more breath than the other guy. To fans, it means neither side gets to celebrate and neither gets to mourn, and the scapegoat is often a panel of undiscerning judges who stuck an "Everybody wins!" gold star in the right-hand column and then slipped out of the arena.

But for the Fight of the Year, a draw can be proof of its merit. It is not, after all, the award for Blowout, Mismatch or Controversy of the Year. It is meant to recognize a struggle, which is sometimes epitomized by two combatants standing as equals after exhausting their attempts to strike each other down.

There weren't too many complaints about the result of Francisco Vargas vs. Orlando Salido, which happened on June 4 at the StubHub Center in Carson, California. Or if there were, nobody heard them over the yells of raw appreciation.

The fight is impossible to describe briefly in terms of momentum because it changed direction so many times. The feeling-out period was over after about 90 seconds and from there it was a 12-chapter story with each round crazier than the one before it, each its own back and forth drama of power-punch brawling and temple-to-temple infighting.

Some rounds seemed to consist entirely of uppercuts and hooks to the body and there was rarely much airspace between the two men. Round 5, in which Salido threw two jabs and landed neither, could've been fought in the bed of a pickup truck. It was sometimes difficult to tell where one combination ended and another began.

Digest these CompuBox numbers for a moment: 2,123 punches were thrown overall; 1,593 of them were power punches, which added 118 to the previous junior lightweight record set by Jesus Chavez and Carlos Hernandez in 2005.

And somehow there were no knockdowns. Somehow neither man's arms detached at the shoulder and flew into the audience.

It's inexplicable how such toughness exists. It's the kind of spectacle that resorts to dollar-store metaphysics for description – something about two people combining into a single will, a single body battling itself. It's the sort of fight to make an awestruck boxing writer sound ridiculous.

But nobody familiar with Salido is surprised that he weathered a tough fight, even one as brutal as this. And of course Vargas has nothing to prove either; he was one half of the THE RING's 2015 Fight of the Year, in which he staged an extraordinary comeback to knock out Takashi Miura in the ninth round. That makes this the 20th FOTY to feature at least one fighter from the previous year, though it has happened only eight other times since 1964.

When the draw was announced, both fighters were understandably upset. Such incredible individual efforts deserve individual rewards. And yet the fight itself is the perfect winner. It is the masterpiece they created together. ★

RUNNERS UP

JESUS SOTO KARASS D 10 YOSHIHIRO KAMEGAI I

Tickets for this "LA Fight Club" main event were snapped up as soon as they went on sale by those who knew it would be a war. They were wise. Kamegai and Soto Karass threw everything they had at each other for 10 breathless rounds.

JAMIE CONLAN KO 8 ANTHONY NELSON

Nelson went down in the first round and a more squeamish referee could've ended this fight as early as the second, with the Englishman getting blistered on the ropes. In the third it was Conlan who hit the deck, though, and the next five rounds were give and take until a hook just below Nelson's rib cage ended his night.

ROMAN GONZALEZ UD 12 CARLOS CUADRAS

Gonzalez didn't bother with a test drive in his first fight at 115 pounds, aiming instead for a top-rated titleholder, and Cuadras didn't waste any energy on admiring "Chocolatito's" pound-for-pound crown. Instead, we saw the best fighter in the world challenged by a worthy opponent in an all-action display of skill and will.

DILLIAN WHYTE SD 12 DERECK CHISORA

Anyone pining for an exciting heavyweight battle from the past two decades should seek out this anomaly right now. Whyte and Chisora fought to the brink of collapse in an all-out firefight the likes of which hasn't been seen in the glamour division for years.

THE BEST OF 2016

KNOCKOUT OF THE YEAR

BY MICHAEL ROSENTHAL

CANELO ALVAREZ KO 6 AMIR KHAN

The magnitude of the matchup + the sheer violence of its conclusion = THE RING Magazine Knockout of the Year.

One could fairly describe the Canelo-Alvarez-Amir Khan matchup as a one-punch KO waiting to happen given Canelo's size advantage – as well as his punching power – and Khan's notoriously weak chin.

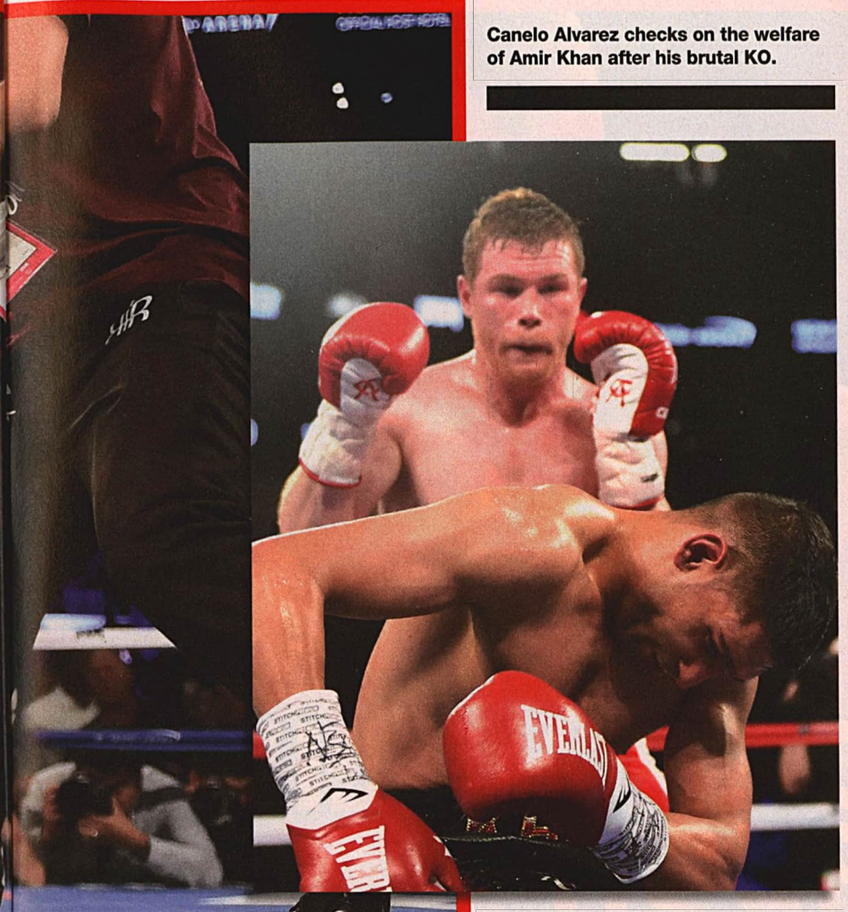
That certainly didn't detract from the drama of the event, which took place on May 7 at the new T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas on pay-per-view television. It was impossible to look away.

Khan did what many expected him to do early in the fight, which was to use his speed and skills to outbox the favorite, who was defending his RING and WBC middleweight titles. The athletic Englishman punched and moved, punched and moved as the bigger man struggled to catch him.

Team Canelo had to be at least somewhat nervous a few rounds into the fight, as an upset seemed possible.

And then Canelo began to close the distance on Khan, began to touch him more and more as the fight went on. The underdog was competitive until the end but you could sense that something was about to happen.

NAOKI FUKUDA



Canelo Alvarez checks on the welfare of Amir Khan after his brutal KO.

The moment it did was chilling.

The fighters seemed to be in a lull as the clock ticked down in the sixth round, each looking for openings. Khan threw two short, lazy jabs and Canelo feinted slightly with his left. Then – with Khan's left hand down – Canelo seized his opportunity: He landed a perfectly timed, powerful right to the worst possible location, Khan's jaw.

The Englishman pitched forward for a split second and then fell flat on his back, lying still and staring blankly at the ceiling as Canelo's fans – the vast majority of those present – leapt to their feet and shook the arena with their voices.

Referee Kenny Bayless had no reason to count amid the buzz; he simply knelt next to Khan and waved his arms, officially ending the fight with 23 seconds remaining in the round.

"He is a fast fighter," Canelo said of Khan. "I knew things would be complicated in the beginning but I knew they would come to my favor as the fight went on."

And, indeed, they did.

The victory probably won't be remembered as one of the greatest in Canelo's career given his perceived advantages. The particularly violent nature of the knockout will be impossible to forget, though. ★

RUNNERS UP

DEONTAY WILDER KO 9 ARTUR SZPILKA

They say that any heavyweight can knock out any opponent with the right punch. And when that heavyweight is Wilder … well, it can be very brutal. Szpilka was moving forward and in the process of throwing a left but Wilder beat him to the punch, landing a chopping right. Lights out – instantly.

JOE SMITH JR. KO 1 ANDRZEJ FONFARA

Fonfara probably wasn't much more familiar with Smith than the rest of us were beforehand. Afterward, we all had learned at least one thing: Smith punches hard. Fonfara was fighting aggressively – perhaps recklessly – when Smith put him on his pants with a hard right. Fonfara got up, went down again, and that was that.

THOMAS WILLIAMS KO 2 EDWIN RODRIGUEZ

The Williams-Rodriguez fight was so violent that it could've ended only one way. The fighters took turns hurting one another with wild shots in a frenetically paced fight when Williams decided enough was enough. He landed a right, followed by a wicked left hook that sent Rodriguez crashing to the canvas. Rodriguez got up but was in no shape to continue.

JOE SMITH JR. KO 8 BERNARD HOPKINS

It was that kind of year for Smith. The new light heavyweight on the block, only six months removed from the Fonfara KO, ruined the then-51-year-old Hopkins' goodbye party by punching him through the ropes and onto the arena floor, which is where the future Hall of Famer's career ended. It was a strange night.

ROUND OF THE YEAR

BY BRIAN HARTY

SKENDER HALILI VS. JASON THOMPSON, ROUND 2

There's a good chance you've never heard of these two guys. You don't have to know the driver's name to take a ride, though.

New York journeyman Jason Thompson was 5-11-4 (4 knockouts) going into his fight against Skender Halili (9-1 with 9 KOs at the time), who was himself an obscure prospect from Kosovo by way of the Bronx. The two junior middleweights were matched up in a six-round swing bout on the undercard of Jarrell Miller vs. Nick Guivas, which took place on May 27 at a casino just a short, misty stroll from Niagara Falls.

By all criteria it was a straightforward, career-building exercise for Halili: He was 25 and Thompson was 35; he was 6 feet tall and Thompson was 5-foot-7. Thompson hadn't won a fight since 2009.

There were no surprises in Round 1; Thompson couldn't get close enough and Halili mostly kept it that way. But in Round 2 Thompson infiltrated no-man's land and connected with an overhand right that rubberized Halili and dropped him on his back with 2½ minutes still on the clock.

Halili regained his feet but for the next 90 seconds had to endure Thompson's rabid follow-up assault while trying to reverse the tide with something dramatic of his own. Just when Thompson appeared to be punching himself out, he summoned another burst and scored a second knockdown with a left hook that would've floored Halili again had it not been for the ropes.

The upset loomed, but so did the question of whether Thompson had enough fuel left to get there.

The bounce had drained from Halili's legs, so he planted his feet and channeled his reserves into choice power shots while his now-exhausted foe searched in vain for the coup de grace. A flush left hook and two nasty uppercuts put the wobble in Thompson's knees and suddenly he was the one in trouble throwing windmills to survive.

With just five seconds left, Thompson wound up for a big right and Halili seized the opportunity to step forward with a much shorter punch of his own. It connected, and the underdog's lights were out even as his last punch swept harmlessly over his opponent's head.

Thompson collapsed onto the referee's shoe tips and remained prostrate for two minutes as concerned parties knelt beside him. Undoubtedly feeling more than just concern, Halili was among them. ★

PHOTO CREDIT: MICHAEL GONZALEZ

Skender Halili (with tattoo) and Jason Thompson let loose in Round 2.

RUNNERS UP

TOM DORAN VS. LUKE KEELER, ROUND 1

For 1 minute, 43 seconds it was unremarkable, then Keeler seamlessly combined a left-handed body shot with an overhand right and Doran went down. Amidst the bombs that followed, both men avoided knockdowns by way of lenient refereeing before Keeler hit the canvas for real. He survived the turnaround but was stopped in Round 2.

SHINSUKE YAMANAKA VS. ANSELMO MORENO II, ROUND 1

It was the stylist surprising the KO artist just after the one-minute mark, when a five-punch combo from Moreno buckled Yamanaka's legs. Other neck-twisters followed, but with 20 seconds remaining the southpaw from Japan reasserted his reputation with a short left that floored Moreno and set the stage for a finesse vs. power duel.

FRANCISCO VARGAS VS. ORLANDO SALIDO, ROUND 6

You could flip a 12-sided coin and get a worthy three minutes from this fight, but Round 6 was a battle that characterized the war. Salido would put his head down and hammer Vargas into retreat only to be straightened by uppercuts and forced into reverse himself. Back and forth they went, just as it would be throughout the second half of their astonishing ordeal.

KEITH THURMAN VS. SHAWN PORTER, ROUND 9

The fight had the tension of a classic mongoose vs. cobra showdown, with the tenacious Porter showing his disdain for the puncher's comfort zone and Thurman searching for his moments to strike the incoming pressure fighter. This round had several clashes when they forgot their roles and just threw down.

UPSET OF THE YEAR

BY DAVID GREISMAN

JOE SMITH JR. KO 1 ANDRZEJ FONFARA

Andrzej Fonfara went a hard 12 rounds with "Superman." He didn't last three minutes with Everyman.

That would be Joe Smith Jr., a construction worker by day who demolished Fonfara one night in June.

Fonfara was a scrappy 175-pound contender who made his name battling through adversity and giving a few notable opponents more trouble than they anticipated. He came from behind to stop former titleholder Gabriel Campillo in 2013. He came from off the canvas in 2014 to score a knockdown on the aforementioned "Superman," light heavyweight champion Adonis Stevenson, dropping a decision but winning respect. He made Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. quit in 2015. And he won a nonstop battle against Nathan Cleverly later that year that saw the fighters combine to throw more than 2,500 punches.

Smith, meanwhile, had never been in the spotlight nor fought anyone near Fonfara's level. He'd been defeated once, suffering a broken jaw and getting stopped in four rounds by Eddie Caminero in 2010. Caminero was just 6-3 at the time and is 7-9 now.

Smith was young (just shy of 21) and inexperienced (just 6-0) in that loss to Caminero. He was 26 years old and had won 15 straight going into the Fonfara fight. Still, Fonfara-Smith was expected to be little more than fun while it lasted.

But no one except Smith and those close to him believed that it would be Fonfara who wouldn't last long.

Smith came out aggressively, starting off with several jabs, closing the distance and sending out hooks. Fonfara was unfazed. He had handled much worse from those much better than Smith. Fonfara began to fire back. An extended combination pushed Smith toward the ropes, where suddenly he pulled his right hand back and sent it crashing into the left side of Fonfara's face.

"He was punching, and I knew he leaves himself open," Smith said afterward. "I was just looking for the punch, and it landed."

"I got too comfortable," Fonfara said. "I didn't see the punch coming."

Fonfara dropped. He got up by the count of four, then stumbled several steps into the ropes. There was a minute left in the round. Smith wouldn't need that long.

"When I see someone hurt, I'm a finisher," he said.

Smith approached and scored with another big, looping right. Fonfara staggered to the ropes. Smith continued to load up and land. Fonfara went down again. The referee waved the fight off, just 2 minutes, 32 seconds into the fight.

It was an upset in the truest sense. This wasn't an accomplished, respected underdog defeating an odds-on favorite. This was someone who was unknown and untested who did something wholly unexpected.

"There's no feeling like this," Smith said afterward. "Now everybody knows who I am. This is the best thing that could have happened."★

NABEEL AHMAD

Joe Smith Jr.'s first-round knockout of Andrzej Fonfara changed his life.

RUNNERS UP

JEZREEL CORRALES TKO 2 TAKASHI UCHIYAMA

Uchiyama had held a world title at 130 pounds for six years. He lost it in six minutes. And he never saw it coming. Corrales had only fought in Panama. He'd scored just seven knockouts in 19 wins. But he'd found power in recent appearances, winning five straight by KO. Three knockdowns in the second round made it six.

BYRON ROJAS UD 12 HEKKIE BUDLER

Budler was one of the best at 105, winning 12 straight after entering the division, capturing a title and defending it with four victories. Rojas had never fought anything approaching a top strawweight. He stepped up when it counted, picking up a narrow decision. Budler blamed an off night. Rojas capitalized on it.

JULIUS INDONGO KO 1 EDUARD TROYANOVSKY

Troyanovsky displayed plenty of power in stopping Cesar Cuenca for a second time in their rematch to win a junior welterweight world title and making short work of Keita Obara in a title defense. But he then wound up on the receiving end of a short night, done in 40 seconds after Indongo, an undefeated prospect fighting for the first time outside of Namibia, landed a big left hand right on the button.

JOHN MOLINA UD 12 RUSLAN PROVODNIKOV

The last time Molina had looked good was while losing a war with Lucas Matthysse in early 2014. After that, he did maddeningly little against Humberto Soto and Adrien Broner. That made facing a bruising pressure fighter like Provodnikov even more dangerous. Molina surprised, throwing nearly 1,100 punches while Provodnikov looked more like the one who was nearing the end of his career.

THE BEST OF 2016

COMEBACK OF THE YEAR

BY NORM FRAUENHEIM

Andre Ward battled back to the top of the boxing world in 2016.

HOGAN PHOTOS

He's a fighter with an artistic bent. That can mean all kinds of things. Like art, Andre Ward is often a subject of interpretation. Like him or dislike him – there's a lot of both. There has never been a consensus about Ward and how he goes about his business.

But the result never changes. On that, there's no interpretation. Ward just wins. Fact is, he always wins, or at least he has for two decades. It is a simple matter of record. He hasn't lost as a pro and hasn't lost a fight of any kind since he was an adolescent.

That know-how is essential in close, controversial fights, and none was closer or more controversial than his decision over Sergey Kovalev on November 19 at Las Vegas' T-Mobile Arena.

Ward won three light heavyweight titles to cap a 4-0 run, three years after a legal dispute with late promoter Dan Goossen and injuries kept him out of the ring for about 19 months.

The former super middleweight champion stormed back into pound-for-pound contention just when it looked as if anonymity might be his fate. It wasn't. It isn't, and that's why Ward (31-0, 15 knockouts) is a slam-dunk pick for THE RING's Comeback of the Year.

It's a choice that will provide Kovalev with another reason to demand an immediate rematch, mandated by a clause in the contract he signed for last November's bout.

Kovalev thought he got robbed and a lot of people agree with him. A furious debate over the scores – 114-113 on all three cards – continues. Kovalev scored the fight's only knockdown, dropping Ward in the second round with a right. According to CompuBox, Kovalev landed 10 more punches, although Ward landed at a higher rate, 34 percent to 27 percent.

Ward also was forced to make the biggest adjustment because of the knockdown. He got up and accomplished the task with a patient, subtle inside game that suffocated Kovalev's jab. Knowing how to adjust in a close fight can often be enough.

Yet if damage can be measured in bruises, the eye check favored Kovalev. The Russian was unmarked. Ward's face was a bumpy collection of welts.

In the end, there were only the scorecards and the subsequent debate. The best, perhaps only resolution rests in a rematch.

Ward needs it to silence all of those who argue he got an early Christmas gift. The business needs a contentious rivalry to halt rapid erosion in the fans' overall interest. Evident dislike and building tension between the Kovalev and Ward camps are exactly the ingredients that go into any good rivalry.

Then there's Kovalev. He might need it more than anybody to prove he was right and the judges wrong with a fight that might allow him to stake his claim on the 2017 Comeback of the Year. ★

RUNNERS UP

MIKEY GARCIA

Technical proficiency has been Mikey Garcia's trademark and it was there, all of it, in a fifth-round TKO of Elio Rojas on July 30 in Garcia's first bout in 2½ years. Top Rank released him in April after a protracted contract dispute. Next stop: Dejan Zlaticanin on January 28 at Las Vegas' MGM Grand for the WBC's 135-pound title. "That layoff made me stronger and more competitive than ever," Garcia said.

HOZUMI HASEGAWA

No apologies were necessary. Nearly three months after securing his place among Japanese legends, Hozumi Hasegawa, 35, formally announced he was retiring. He had nothing to prove after a huge upset, a ninth-round stoppage of Hugo Ruiz in Osaka for the WBC's 122-pound title. It was the culmination of a three-fight run for Hasegawa (36-5, 16 KOs), one of four Japanese fighters with titles at three weights, after a knockout loss to Kiko Martinez in 2014.

DAVID HAYE

Finally, two promises made, two fulfilled. It's only a couple but David Haye fought as if they would be the first of many. After telling the U.K.'s Independent in 2014 he had "lied to them all" about who he was during his time as the WBA's heavyweight champ, he was back in 2016 with stoppages over unknowns Arnold Gjergjaj and Mark de Mori – Haye's first bouts since 2012. Next: March 4 against Tony Bellew.

MANNY PACQUIAO

You can call the first-time Filipino senator a champ all over again. The Honorable Manny Pacquiao restored a boxing championship, the WBO's welterweight version, to his political title with a decision over Jessie Vargas on November 5 in Las Vegas. Pacquiao regained the belt he lost to Floyd Mayweather Jr. in 2015.

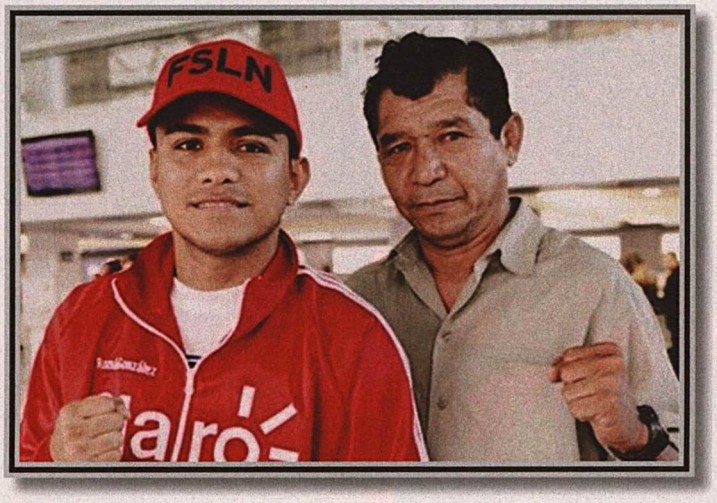
THE BEST OF 2016

TRAINER OF THE YEAR

BY DON STRADLEY

The man behind Roman Gonzalez's rise, Arnulfo Obando, died in November.

ARNULFO OBANDO



He was a brilliant trainer at the top of his game, and in Roman Gonzalez, Arnulfo Obando had an undefeated warrior who was considered the top pound-for-pound fighter on the planet. Obando already was on his way to being chosen as THE RING's Trainer of the Year but the accolade is bittersweet; he died in November at age 53 after suffering a stroke.

Obando had been Gonzalez's trainer since 2010, and though he'd already guided "Chocolatito" to titles in three weight classes, the fighter/trainer duo marched on to dramatic new heights in 2016. Not only did Gonzalez successfully defend the flyweight championship, dominating McWilliams Arroyo to win a 12-round unanimous decision, but he then moved up to 115 pounds to topple junior bantamweight titleholder Carlos Cuadras, also by 12-round decision. The victory over Cuadras made Gonzalez the first Nicaraguan to win belts in four classes, breaking the previous record of three held by Hall of Famer Alexis Arguello.

Gonzalez's manager, Carlos Blandon, said at the time of Obando's death that no outside trainer would be brought in to replace him and that the gap created by Obando's passing will be filled by two other trainers who have long been part of the Gonzalez camp – Luis Gonzalez and Wilmer Hernandez. Of course, it'll never be easy to replace Obando.

As is the case with many of the best trainers, Obando's influence on Gonzalez extended beyond the work they did between the ropes. Roman Gonzalez told THE RING that Obando was always helpful with advice "and would encourage me in my personal decisions as a father would." When asked what made Obando stand out among the many great trainers working today, Gonzalez mentioned Obando's mild-mannered nature, coupled with an insatiable love for the business.

"(It was) his humbleness and his dedication to boxing," Gonzalez said. "He had a huge love for the world of boxing."

Fortunately, the lessons Obando passed along to Gonzalez will still be alive in the fighter's fists and heart. ★

VIRGIL HUNTER

We'll never forget the way Hunter yelled in Andre Ward's ear between rounds of his tough bout with Sergey Kovalev. Ward struggled that night but came away with a close but unanimous decision victory, as well as the IBF, WBA and WBO light heavyweight title belts. Did Hunter's exhortations help Ward win? In such a competitive fight, we'll bet they did.

SHANE MCGUIGAN

Not only has he been able to sidestep comparisons to his famous father, McGuigan has also established himself as an innovative and sought-after coach. Younger than many of his fighters, McGuigan's success with the undefeated Carl Frampton has attracted such recent clients as George Groves and David Haye.

EDDY REYNOSO

Handling Mexico's most beloved fighter is a major responsibility, but Reynoso guided Canelo Alvarez to even more success in 2016. Along with Alvarez's knockout wins over Amir Khan and Liam Smith, Reynoso steered IBF strawweight titleholder Jose Argumedo to a unanimous decision win over Julio Mendoza and a third-round KO of Jose Jimenez.

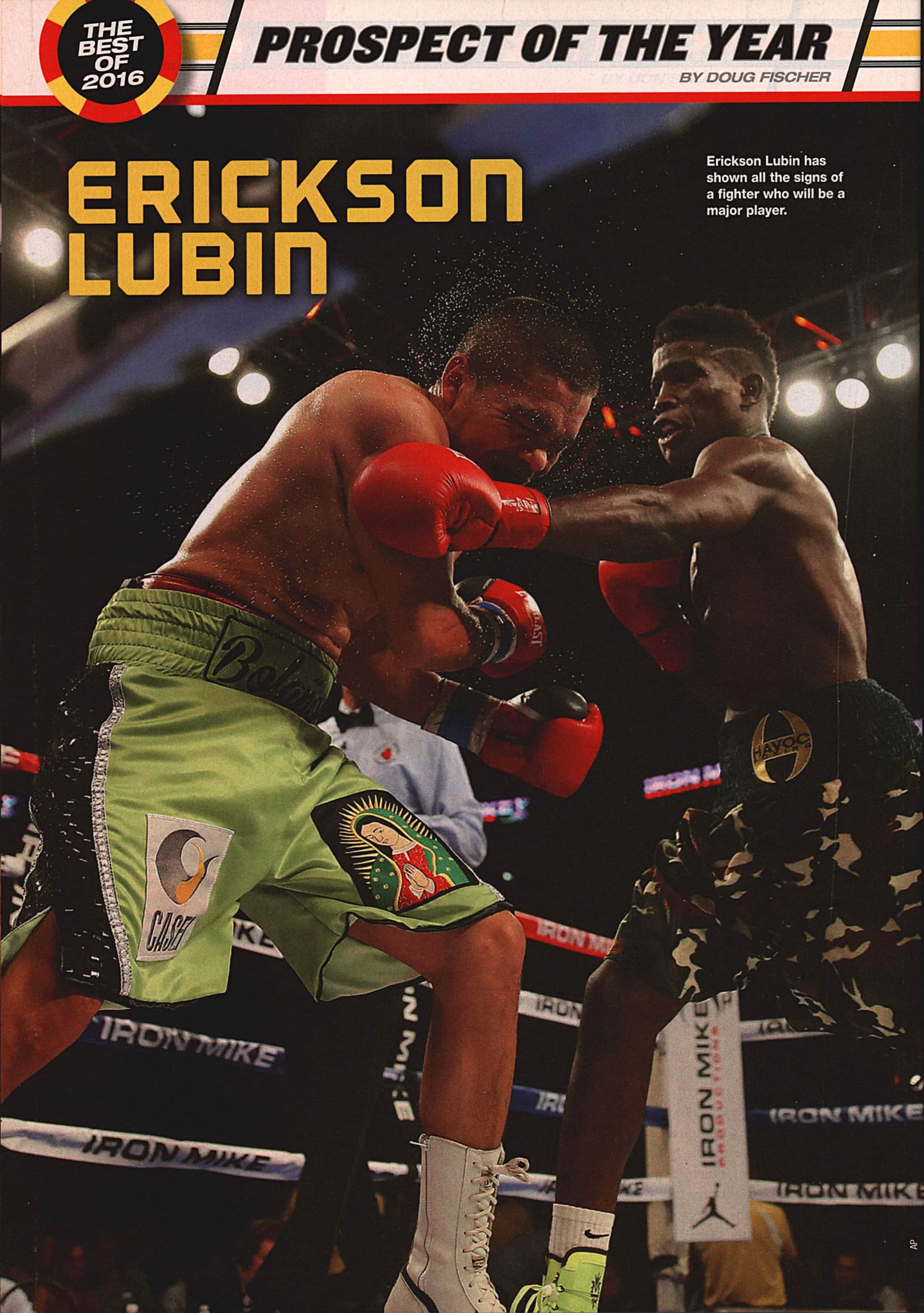
ABEL SANCHEZ

As Gennady Golovkin will tell you, he likes to fight "Mexican style." Much of that can be attributed to his longtime partnership with Sanchez. Sanchez once described the young "GGG" as "fighting like a Klitschko." Since those early days, Golovkin has become a crowd-pleasing KO artist.

PROSPECT OF THE YEAR

BY DOUG FISCHER

ERICKSON LUBIN



Erickson Lubin has shown all the signs of a fighter who will be a major player.

AP

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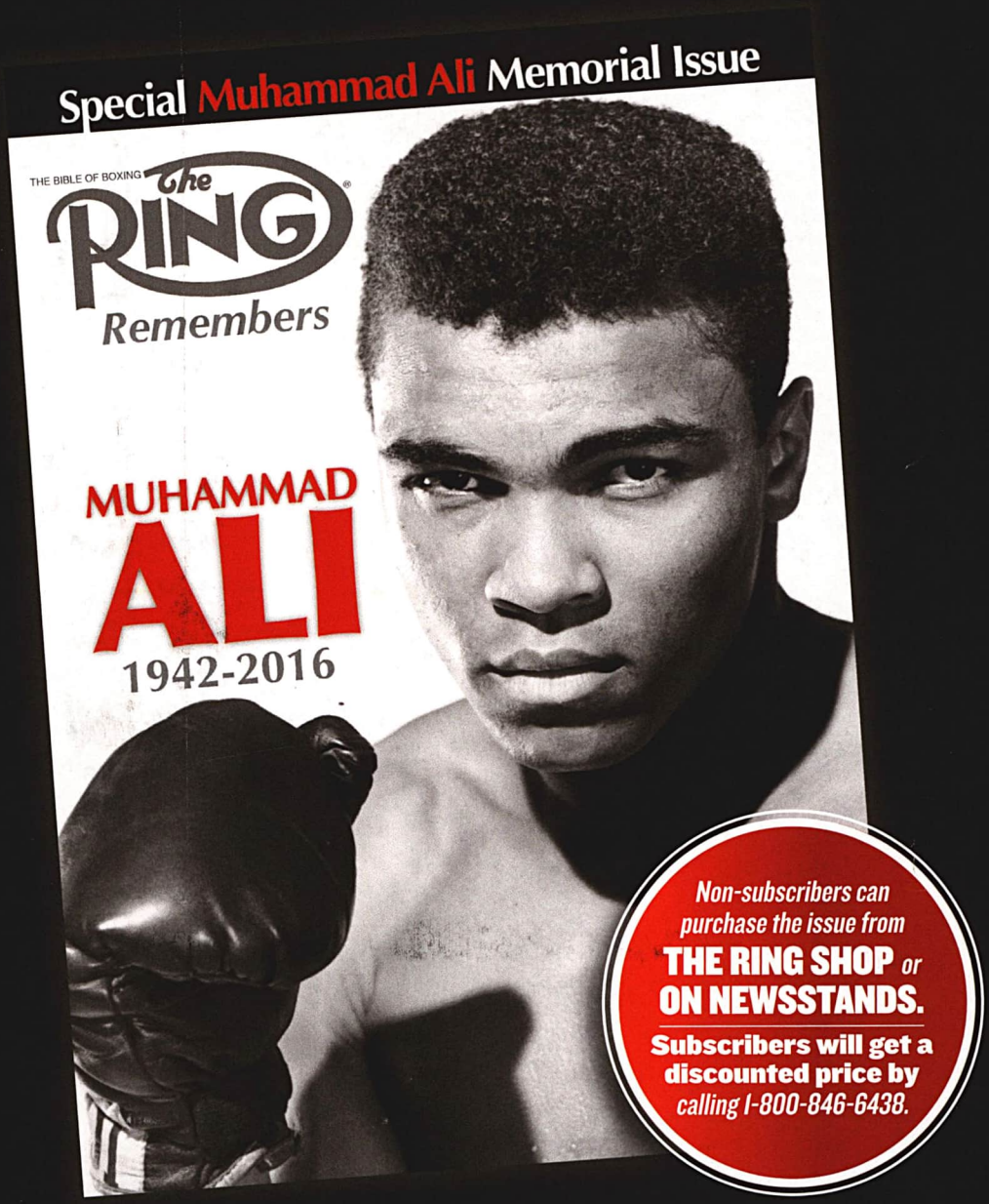
CHARTS THE COURSE OF "THE GREATEST" IN THIS SPECIAL MEMORIAL ISSUE OF THE MAGAZINE.



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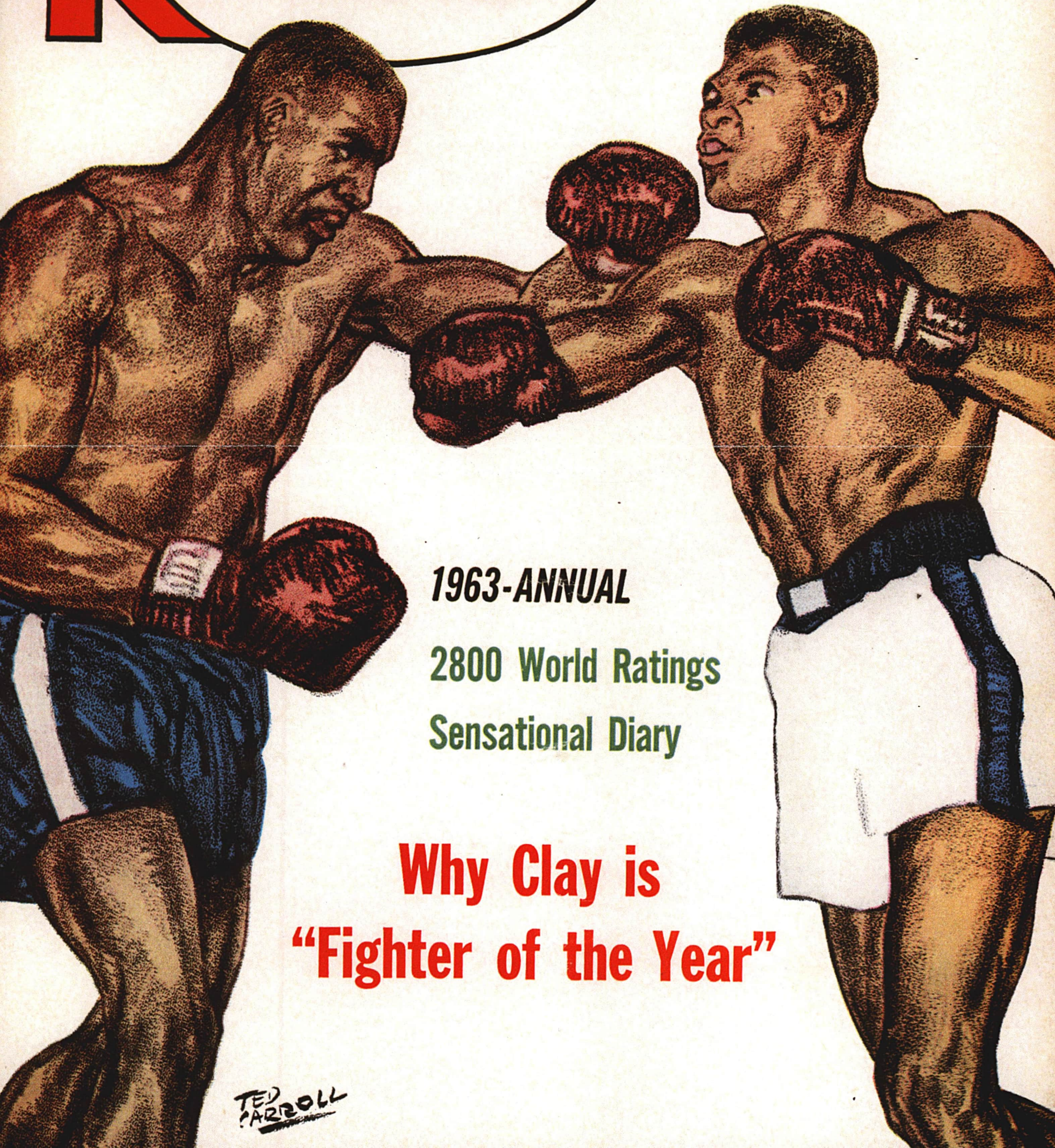

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Why Clay is "Fighter of the Year"

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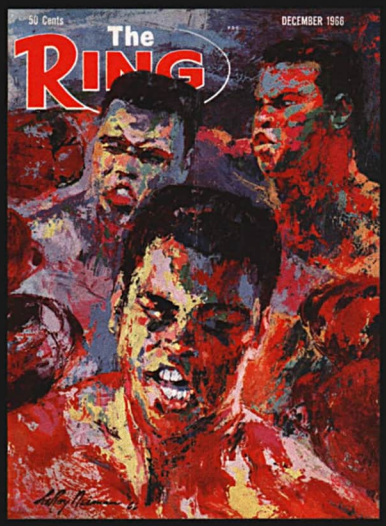
The RING

In honor of Muhammad Ali, THE RING will include a full-color pull-out poster of "The Greatest" in each of the next nine issues of the magazine. The posters are reproductions of particularly compelling RING covers on which Ali was featured.



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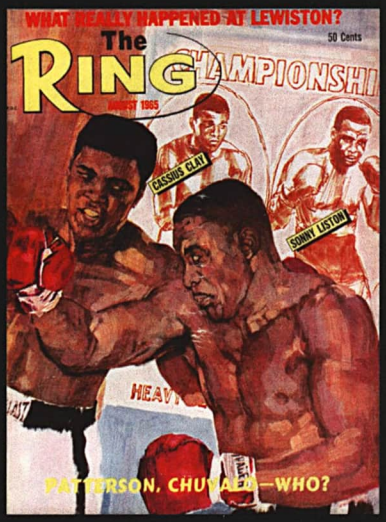

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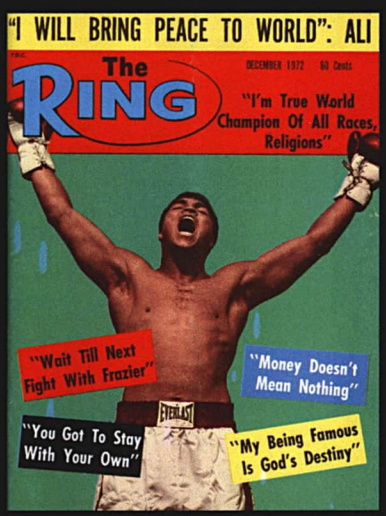

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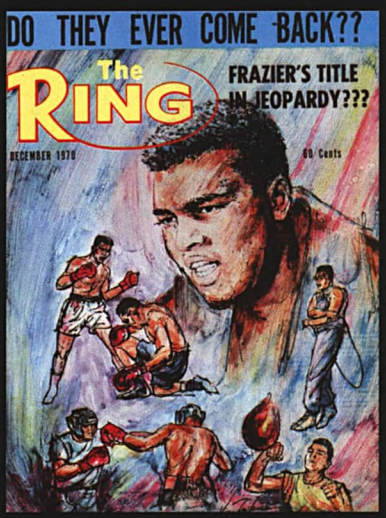

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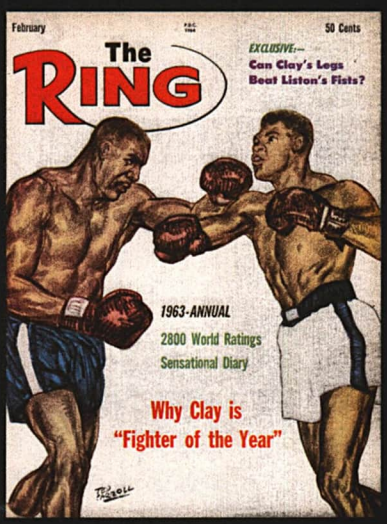

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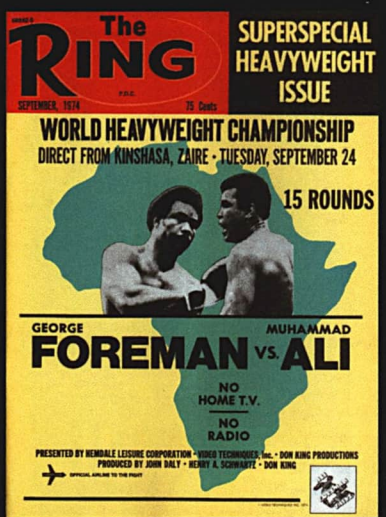

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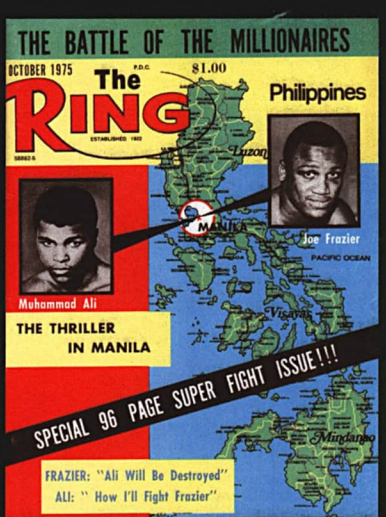

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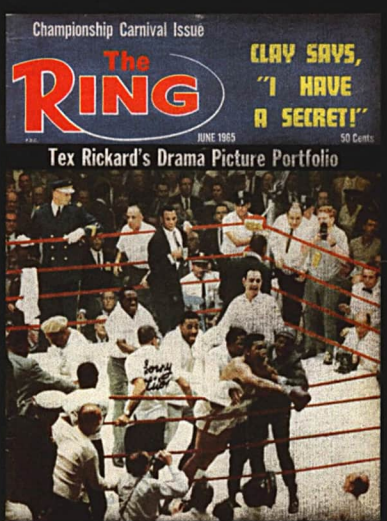


#9 AUGUST 2017

Erickson Lubin caused a stir in the boxing world when he turned pro on his 18th birthday in late 2013, leaving behind what amateur insiders believed was a clear track to a gold medal at the 2016 Olympics. Over the next three years, however, Lubin (17-0, 12 knockouts) continued to command attention with his heavy hands, scoring several knockouts on national TV.

The Orlando, Florida, native had his most impressive year in 2016, exhibiting good technique and ring generalship en route to lopsided decisions over Jose De Jesus Macias and Ivan Montero, while advancing his power-punching reputation with stoppages of Daniel Sandoval and Juan Ubaldo Cabrera.

The 21-year-old southpaw is still a work in progress but the manner in which he outclassed his 2016 opponents – four experienced foes with a combined fight-night record of 99-9-2 – suggests the potential to become a major player in the 154-pound division by the end of 2017.

For now, Lubin is THE RING's Prospect of the Year.

"Against Juan Ubaldo Cabrera, Lubin did exactly what a hot young fighter is supposed to do when matched with an inferior opponent: get rid of him quickly," said Showtime boxing analyst Steve Farhood, who was ringside for Lubin's second-round KO of Cabrera on the Jesus Cuellar-Abner Mares undercard on December 10 in Los Angeles.

Cabrera, 23-1 (15 KOs) going into the Lubin fight, was a former amateur standout from the Dominican Republic. While no spring chicken at 37, Cabrera was a capable boxer who had never been stopped prior to experiencing "The Hammer."

Boxing writer Michael Baca was also ringside for Lubin-Cabrera. He was impressed with what he saw inside and outside the ring.

"Seeing Lubin fight for the first time in person was in stark contrast to the fresh-faced 18-year-old of three years ago," said Baca, a frequent contributor to RingTV.com. "... And shortly after his win, Lubin was at a table signing autographs for fans. Not only did Lubin show signs of serious potential inside the ring, but the added work outside of it was an indication that this kid gets it."

Lubin has star potential but Farhood cautions that it's still early in his pro career. While the boxer-puncher has never fought an opponent with a losing record, he has yet to face a true threat in the ring.

"In general, Lubin's been matched somewhat carefully, mostly because of his tender age. As a result, he hasn't really been tested yet," said Farhood. "But there's been a lot to like. He's a smart fighter who can win in a variety of ways. He's technically solid, and from the start he's been very poised in the ring."

In March, Lubin will fight Jorge Cota in a semi-final elimination bout for the WBC title.

"Lubin's already a 10-round fighter, said Farhood. "In 2017, he'll become a contender in a very hot division." ★

IEVGEN KHYTROV
14-0 (12 KOS)

The 28-year-old former Ukrainian amateur standout fought only twice in 2016 but exhibited brutal efficiency in outpointing once-beaten Kenneth McNeil over 10 rounds and wearing down game young gatekeeper Paul Mendez to a ninth-round TKO. Mendez, 19-2-2 at the time, had never been stopped.

RASHIDI ELLIS
17-0 (12 KOS)

The 23-year-old welterweight from Lynn, Massachusetts, turned the heads of hardcore fans by blitzing once-beaten Eddie Gomez in one round in December. Gomez, once a respected prospect himself, had never been stopped. Ellis used his speed to outpoint Luis Hernandez and Marco Antonio Lopez earlier in 2016.

DAVID BENAVIDEZ
16-0 (15 KOS)

Four fights in 2016 resulted in four KOs for the 20-year-old super middleweight puncher from Phoenix. The younger brother of former welterweight contender Jose Benavidez Jr. made quick work of Kevin Cobbs and Phillip Benson before stopping both unbeaten Francy Ntetu and solid vet Denis Douglin.

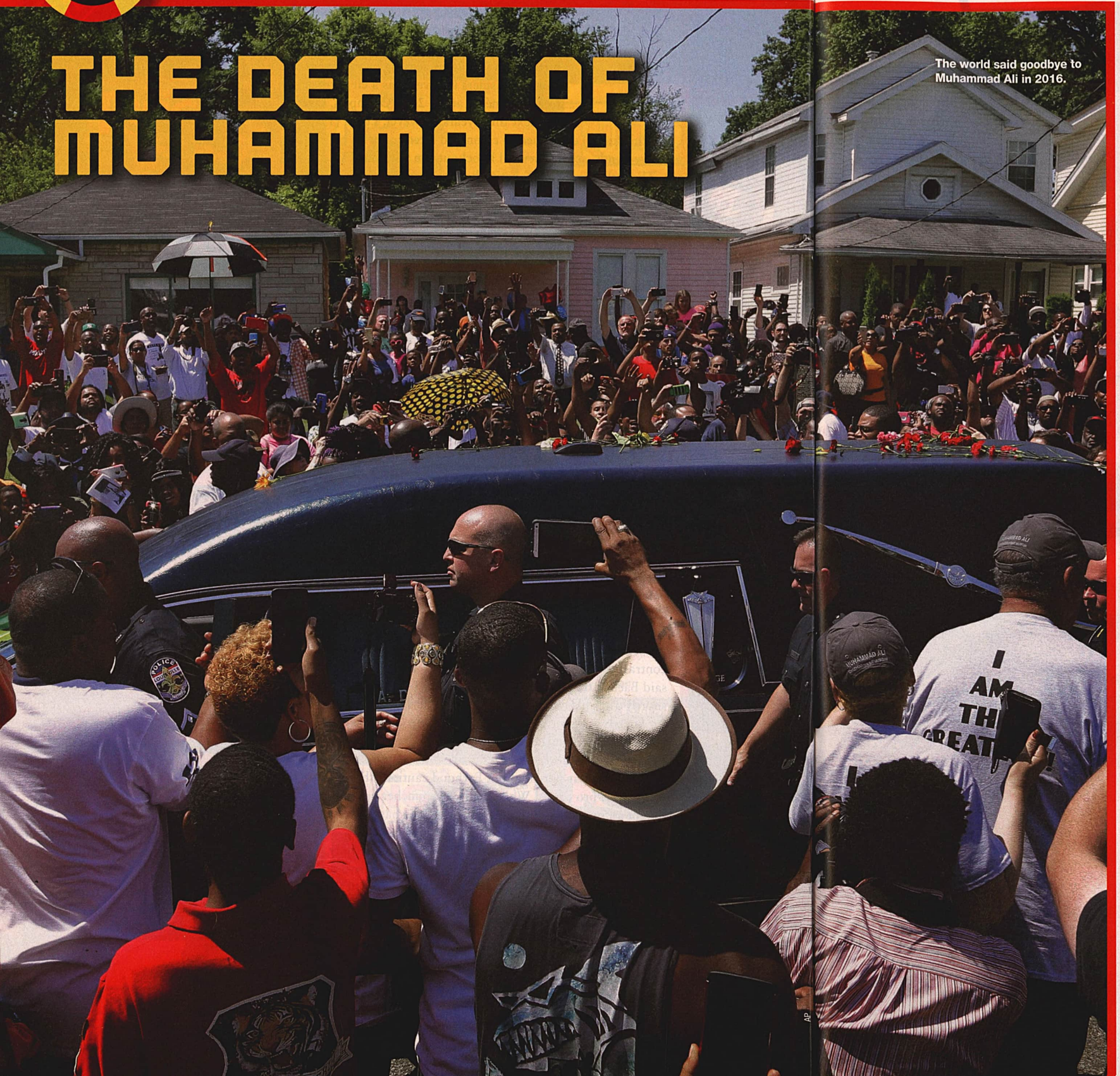
IVAN GOLUB
13-0 (11 KOS)

Golub, a welterweight, is yet another former amateur standout from Ukraine. The tall (5-foot-11), rangy southpaw, who is based in Brooklyn, scored four knockouts in 2016. He showed grit by getting up from a knockdown to stop previously unbeaten Marlon Aguas and reaffirmed his punching power in stoppage wins over Ernesto Oritz and the normally durable James Stevenson.

EVENT OF THE YEAR

BY TOM GRAY

THE DEATH OF MUHAMMAD ALI



The world said goodbye to Muhammad Ali in 2016.

Muhammad Ali battled through life with Parkinson's disease for almost the same amount of time as he had battled without it. Finally, on June 3, 2016, at the age of 74 years old, the most celebrated champion in boxing history succumbed to its effects. But while that horrible condition prevailed in the end, it did so after torrid and savage resistance from a fighter who would take on any challenge – inside and outside of a prize ring.

The passing of Ali was always going to hurt. It didn't matter that it was expected. As relieved as many of us were that "The Greatest's" struggle was over, this news was heartbreaking and, just as he had during his fistic zenith, Ali made the world stop. On the day he died, it would've been a struggle to locate a reputable television channel that wasn't showing his career highlights or speaking with people who had been impacted by this incredible force of nature.

We drew comfort from the fact that every country Ali visited, every person he touched, every champion he influenced, shared in our grief. While he may have been silenced in later years, Ali's enormous and polarizing global appeal spoke louder than ever. An estimated 100,000 people ventured to his hometown of Louisville, Kentucky, to say goodbye to the former three-time heavyweight champion of the world. He was buried at Cave Hill Cemetery and only two words were required on his headstone.

MUHAMMAD ALI.

The great man once said, "He who is not courageous enough to take risks will accomplish nothing in life." While he achieved more than he could ever have dreamed, we owe a massive debt of gratitude to Muhammad Ali for the risks that he took because the world, which was his very own stage, benefitted immeasurably from that philosophy. ★

RUNNERS UP

CANELO ALVAREZ-LIAM SMITH

This matchup may not have sent pulses racing but an opportunity to see Canelo Alvarez do his thing at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, was too much for fight fans to ignore. A crowd of 51,240 of them – more than Manny Pacquiao drew there in either of his two fights – paid to see the Mexican icon halt WBO junior middleweight titleholder Liam Smith in an electrifying atmosphere.

HOPKINS RETIREMENT

He has made more middleweight title defenses than any other fighter in boxing history. He is the oldest man to ever win a world title. He is the oldest man to unify world titles. Don't hold your breath waiting for these records to be broken. At the age of 51, the legendary Philadelphia warrior retired for good following an eighth-round knockout loss to Joe Smith Jr. at the Forum in Inglewood.

THE DEATH OF MIKE TOWELL

Mike Towell was a 25-year-old welterweight from Dundee, Scotland, who tragically succumbed to injuries sustained in a fifth-round stoppage loss to Dale Evans. It was disclosed afterward that Towell, a devout family man, had complained of headaches during training camp yet the fight took place. We don't have all the answers but lessons need to be learned once we do.

SERGEY KOVALEV-ANDRE WARD

The year 2016 was lacking in terms of superfights, but the biggest one available lived up to the hype. Kovalev dropped Ward in Round 2 and controlled the early sessions with his skills and tenacity. This forced Ward to fight under fire for the first time in his career and, despite an uproar in relation to Ward's unanimous-decision victory, fans were treated to a terrific fight.

THE BEST OF 2016

MOST INSPIRATIONAL

BY RON BORGES

BERNARD HOPKINS

Of Bernard Hopkins' many strengths, belief in himself has been the most important. Even when few shared that faith, he believed he was more than his surroundings indicated.

This was not always true, especially when he was living the life of a street thug incarcerated at the age of 17 after one too many violent encounters in the depths of Philadelphia's broken places. But it was behind the cold walls of Graterford Prison, near Philadelphia, that Hopkins began to prove he was more than he appeared to be.

He seemed an unlikely candidate for redemption and resurrection at that time, a point thrust on him by Buddy Rush, Graterford's warden. Upon Hopkins' release after nearly five years, Rush told him he'd see him in six months. Hopkins promised otherwise and then did the hardest thing: He turned words into deeds. That was nearly 30 years ago and today Bernard Hopkins has made his case.

He'd become reacquainted with boxing in Graterford and turned pro not long after returning home. He lost his first fight and then served a year of apprenticeship in Philly's tough gyms while washing pots and pans in a hotel restaurant before returning to the arena he would come to dominate. He won that night and kept on mostly winning for 30 years.

In between he defended the middleweight title a record 20 times, although it took him seven years to first win it and he had to overcome losing his first title fight to Roy Jones Jr. before his victory streak began. Eventually he would become the first middleweight to unify the title since Marvin Hagler and the first to hold the four major sanctioning-body belts – WBC, WBA, IBF and WBO – (plus the RING championship) simultaneously.

He would defeat big-name opponents like Oscar De La Hoya, Felix Trinidad and Jones in a rematch and become one of the best fighters of his era, but it took far longer than it should have for his skills both inside the ring and at the negotiating table to be recognized. Through it all, he remained his own man, marching like the woodsy philosopher Henry David Thoreau to the beat of his own drum.

He would become the oldest fighter to win a world title, doing that three times after moving up to light heavyweight. He also became the lineal champion.

In the end, Bernard Hopkins became one of the most successful fighters of his generation, a millionaire with a Hall of Fame resume who stands as an example for many that regardless of where you start in life, if you run your race to the end and stay true to yourself, you will win. Not all the time and not always in the eyes of your critics, but you will become more than anyone thought possible.

"My legacy is not just winning because sometimes I didn't win," the nearly 52-year-old Hopkins said not long before his final fight, when he was stopped for the only time in his career after being knocked out of the ring by Joe Smith Jr.

"In life, you will be challenged. Sometimes you will lose because life is about loss as much as it is winning. Everybody loses things in life. What do you do after those losses? What do you do when those challenges come?"

What Bernard Hopkins did was show the world that defeat didn't matter as long as you got up, dusted yourself off and moved forward, always looking to win one more fight. ★

MATTHEW HEASLEY

Bernard Hopkins became the perfect role model.

RUNNERS UP

CLARESSA SHIELDS

Shields grew up rudderless and in poverty in Flint, Michigan. Her father was incarcerated from the time she was 2 until she was 9; her mother battled addiction issues, leaving her and her sisters living a transient life. Still, she became the only U.S. fighter – male or female – to win two Olympic gold medals.

JOE SMITH JR.

Turns out the 27-year-old light heavyweight contender is no "ordinary Joe." A jackhammer operator from Long Island and a member of Local 66 of the Laborers Union, Smith worked by day and trained by night. And the dedication paid off in 2016: He KO'd Andrzej Fonfara, a stunning upset, and then stopped Bernard Hopkins.

JOSE RAMIREZ

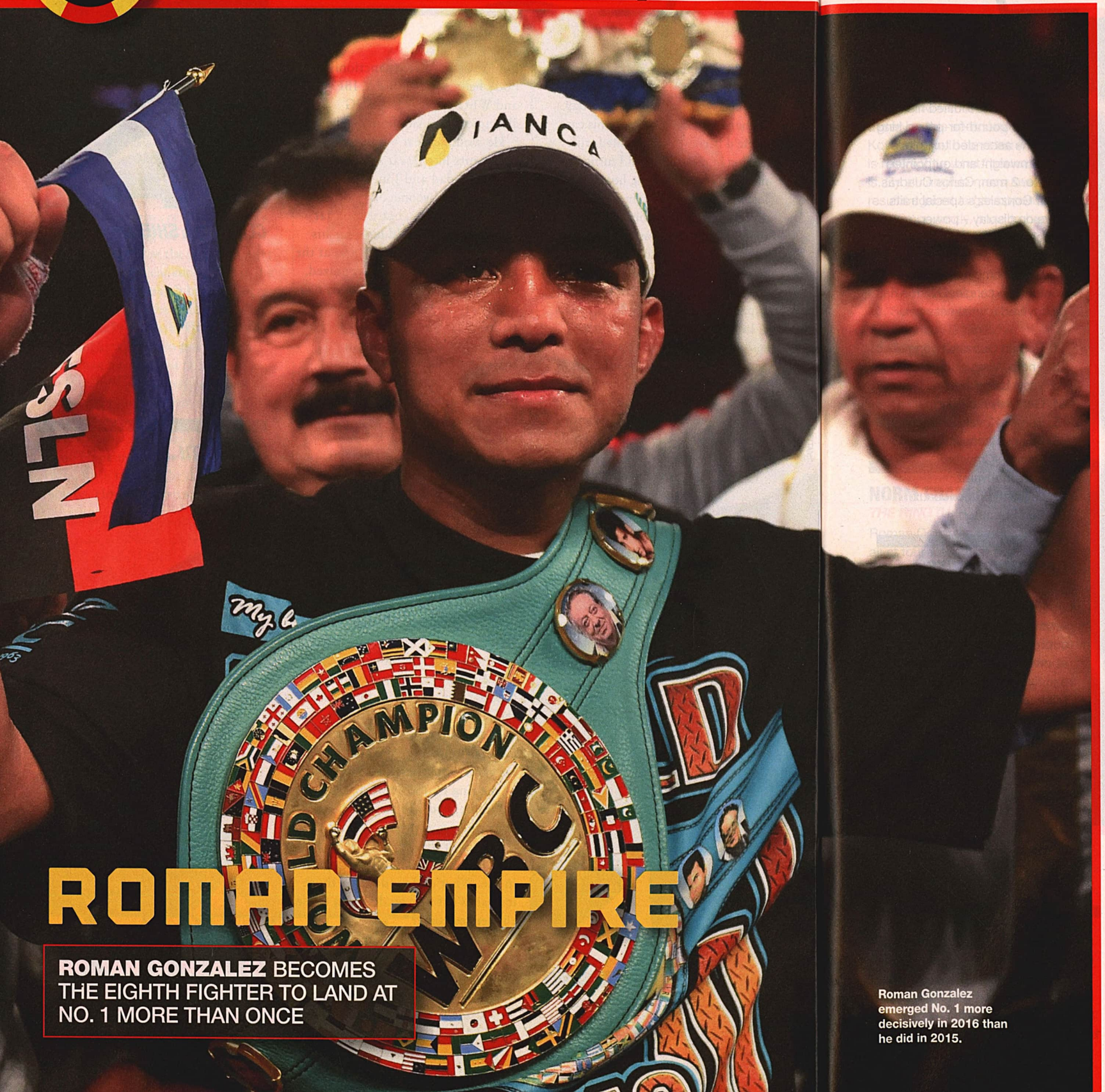
The 24-year-old American Olympian is fighting on two fronts. He is not only a Top 10-rated junior welterweight contender but is also fighting to help California farm workers like his parents in their battle over water rights in the drought-torn state.

HOZUMI HASEGAWA

The former two-division titleholder seemed to be finished as an elite fighter when he was stopped by Kiko Martinez in 2014. Then he did something unusual this past September: He went down in weight (to 122 pounds) to face titleholder Hugo Ruiz, won by KO and then walked away from boxing. Bravo.

BEST FIGHTER POLL

BY MICHAEL ROSENTHAL



ROMAN EMPIRE

ROMAN GONZALEZ BECOMES THE EIGHTH FIGHTER TO LAND AT NO. 1 MORE THAN ONCE

Roman Gonzalez emerged No. 1 more decisively in 2016 than he did in 2015.

Roman Gonzalez remains a small wonder.

The 29-year-old Nicaraguan had another big year in 2016, winning two important fights and a title in a fourth weight division. Thus, it's no shock that Gonzalez landed at No. 1 in consecutive years in THE RING's annual Best Fighter Poll of 10 boxing experts from seven countries.

Gonzalez received 135 points (out of a possible 150) and seven first-place votes. That mirrored last year, when he received 138 points and seven first-place votes.

He became the eighth fighter to finish No. 1 in back-to-back years since the poll was instituted in 1980. The others: Floyd Mayweather Jr., Manny Pacquiao, Roy Jones Jr., Pernell Whitaker, Julio Cesar Chavez, Mike Tyson and Marvin Hagler.

Those eight also are the only fighters to be voted No. 1 more than once. Mayweather won a record seven overall polls, one more than Jones, who won six between 1995 and 2003.

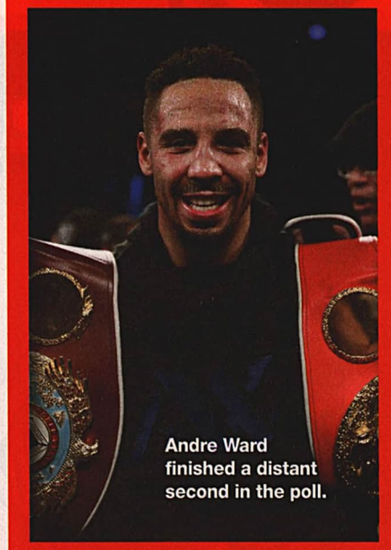
Andre Ward finished a distant second this year with 97 points (and one first-place vote), only two points more than No. 3 Gennady Golovkin (one first-place vote) and 13 more than No. 4 Sergey Kovalev.

Pacquiao finished seventh in the poll with 39 points, his 10th appearance in the Top 10. That equals Bernard Hopkins for No. 3 overall. Mayweather was in a record 15 Top 10s over 16 years, followed by Jones with 12.

Two fighters dropped out of the Top 10 from last year: Tim Bradley (No. 9 last year) and Juan Francisco Estrada (No. 10 last year). They were replaced by the surging Vasyl Lomachenko (No. 5 and one first-place vote) and Carl Frampton (No. 10).

In the poll, the fighters received points for each vote: 15 points for a first-place vote, 12 for second, nine for third, seven for fourth, six for fifth, five for sixth, four for seventh, three for eighth, two for ninth and one for 10th. ★

2016 POLL RESULTS



Andre Ward finished a distant second in the poll.

1. **ROMAN GONZALEZ** 135 (7)
2. **ANDRE WARD** 97 (1)
3. **GENNADY GOLOVKIN** 95 (1)
4. **SERGEY KOVALEV** 84
5. **VASYL LOMACHENKO** 62 (1)
6. **TERENCE CRAWFORD** 53
7. **MANNY PACQUIAO** 39
8. **CANELO ALVAREZ** 34
9. **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX** 18
10. **CARL FRAMPTON** 9

OTHERS RECEIVING VOTES
SHINSUKE YAMANAKA 6, WANHENG MENAYOTHIN 4, NAOYA INOUE 2, JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA 1, KEITH THURMAN 1.

FIRST-PLACE VOTES ARE IN PARENTHESES.

THE BEST OF 2016

BEST FIGHTER POLL

BY MICHAEL ROSENTHAL

Terence Crawford has finished in the Top 10 in back-to-back years.

MIKE COPPINGER

USA TODAY (U.S.)

"Chocolatito" solidified his status as pound-for-pound king when he ascended to junior bantamweight and outpointed the No. 2 man, Carlos Cuadras. All of Gonzalez's special traits were on display – power punching, speed and the ability to side-step while delivering blistering combinations from confounding angles. No foe has discovered a weakness yet.

1. Roman Gonzalez
2. Andre Ward
3. Vasyl Lomachenko
4. Gennady Golovkin
5. Sergey Kovalev
6. Manny Pacquiao
7. Terence Crawford
8. Canelo Alvarez
9. Guillermo Rigondeaux
10. Carl Frampton

GARETH A DAVIES

THE TELEGRAPH / THE RING (ENGLAND)

Artist, dancer, fighter, supreme talent. Unmatched at present and the most exciting small fighter since Michael Carbajal, he is Nicaragua's "little big man." Gonzalez is widely unknown outside boxing, but the skilled technician from Managua is the most complete fighter on the planet and a four-weight world champion.

RON BORGES

BOSTON HERALD / THE RING (U.S.)

Vasyl Lomachenko has a wider array of skills and more ways to win than anyone in boxing. Although he has only eight professional fights, his long amateur career well prepared him to become what he is today: the best pound-for-pound fighter in the sport.

1. Vasyl Lomachenko
2. Terence Crawford
3. Sergey Kovalev
4. Gennady Golovkin
5. Roman Gonzalez
6. Andre Ward
7. Wanheng Menayothin
8. Canelo Alvarez
9. Guillermo Rigondeaux
10. Manny Pacquiao

1. Roman Gonzalez
2. Andre Ward
3. Sergey Kovalev
4. Gennady Golovkin
5. Vasyl Lomachenko
6. Terence Crawford
7. Guillermo Rigondeaux
8. Canelo Alvarez
9. Shinsuke Yamanaka
10. Carl Frampton

MIKEY WILLIAMS

COREY ERDMAN
THE RING (CANADA)

The winner of a once-in-a-generation battle between two Top 3 fighters deserves this spot. Any argument that Kovalev should be rated above Ward is reinventing what "pound for pound" is. By all tangible measures – resume, results against larger opponents and, most importantly, head to head – Ward is No. 1.

1. Andre Ward
2. Roman Gonzalez
3. Sergey Kovalev
4. Gennady Golovkin
5. Terence Crawford
6. Manny Pacquiao
7. Vasyl Lomachenko
8. Guillermo Rigondeaux
9. Canelo Alvarez
10. Shinsuke Yamanaka

NORM FRAUENHEIM
THE RING (U.S.)

Roman Gonzalez has beaten them all at four weights in a historic run to No. 1 on the pound-for-pound scale. He's been there for more than a year, unbeaten and unchallenged. A challenge is the loss of trainer Arnulfo Obando, who died in November from a stroke. Adversity in the face of tragedy might be his biggest fight.

1. Roman Gonzalez
2. Gennady Golovkin
3. Andre Ward
4. Sergey Kovalev
5. Terence Crawford
6. Manny Pacquiao
7. Vasyl Lomachenko
8. Canelo Alvarez
9. Carl Frampton
10. Naoya Inoue

NICK GIONGCO
MANILA BULLETIN (PHILIPPINES)

Gonzalez has made heads turn in recent years and he will continue to do so in 2017. I would have put GGG at No. 2 if he had fought the marquee names. Same goes with Canelo. Crawford and Lomachenko are on the cusp of a breakout year. Pacquiao's win over Vargas is enough to merit a Top 5 slot.

1. Roman Gonzalez
2. Sergey Kovalev
3. Gennady Golovkin
4. Andre Ward
5. Manny Pacquiao
6. Vasyl Lomachenko
7. Canelo Alvarez
8. Terence Crawford
9. Carl Frampton
10. Shinsuke Yamanaka

TOM GRAY
THE RING (SCOTLAND)

Roman Gonzalez has the best record of any fighter on my list. He has won more world titles at different weights than any fighter on my list. He is arguably the most complete fighter on my list. He is gracefully flying the flag for the little guys and it's great to see.

1. Roman Gonzalez
2. Andre Ward
3. Sergey Kovalev
4. Gennady Golovkin
5. Terence Crawford
6. Canelo Alvarez
7. Vasyl Lomachenko
8. Guillermo Rigondeaux
9. Shinsuke Yamanaka
10. Carl Frampton

DAN RAFAEL
ESPN.COM (U.S.)

Roman Gonzalez has, for years, displayed dominance and consistency while defeating several quality opponents and has done so moving up the scale through four weight divisions. He has the overall skills and resume needed to be the pound-for-pound king.

1. Roman Gonzalez
2. Gennady Golovkin
3. Andre Ward
4. Sergey Kovalev
5. Vasyl Lomachenko
6. Manny Pacquiao
7. Terence Crawford
8. Canelo Alvarez
9. Carl Frampton
10. Naoya Inoue

GUNNAR MEINHARDT
DIE WELT (GERMANY)

Gennady Golovkin is the most complete and exciting fighter. His goal is simple: to defeat the opponents inside the distance. His record speaks for itself: He is undefeated in 36 fights and has 23 KOs in a row. Hopefully we will see two showdowns in 2017: first vs. Daniel Jacobs (on March 18), then vs. Canelo Alvarez.

1. Gennady Golovkin
2. Roman Gonzalez
3. Andre Ward
4. Sergey Kovalev
5. Manny Pacquiao
6. Vasyl Lomachenko
7. Terence Crawford
8. Canelo Alvarez
9. Guillermo Rigondeaux
10. Juan Francisco Estrada

SALVADOR RODRIGUEZ
ESPN DEPORTES (MEXICO)

Roman Gonzalez was the king in 2015 and then took the challenge of moving up to 115 pounds, where he won a close decision over tough Mexican Carlos Cuadras to become the first four-division titleholder from Nicaragua. He is still undefeated and taking risks in the ring, which is what every fan wants.

1. Roman Gonzalez
2. Gennady Golovkin
3. Sergey Kovalev
4. Andre Ward
5. Manny Pacquiao
6. Canelo Alvarez
7. Vasyl Lomachenko
8. Terence Crawford
9. Guillermo Rigondeaux
10. Keith Thurman

PAST POLLS

2015 POLL

1. Roman Gonzalez – 138 (7)
2. Gennady Golovkin – 114 (3)
3. Sergey Kovalev – 80
4. Andre Ward – 63
5. Manny Pacquiao – 50
6. Canelo Alvarez – 47
7. Terence Crawford – 40
8. Guillermo Rigondeaux – 39
9. Tim Bradley – 38
10. Juan Francisco Estrada – 10

2014 POLL

1. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 150 (10)
2. Manny Pacquiao – 89
3. Wladimir Klitschko – 71
4. Roman Gonzalez – 64
5. Guillermo Rigondeaux – 61
6. Gennady Golovkin – 43
7. Juan Manuel Marquez – 35
8. Andre Ward – 28
9. Sergey Kovalev – 26
10. Miguel Cotto – 21

2013 POLL

1. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 150 (10)
2. Andre Ward – 117
3. Tim Bradley – 62
4T. Juan Manuel Marquez – 53
4T. Manny Pacquiao – 53
6. Wladimir Klitschko – 48
7. Sergio Martinez – 47
8. Guillermo Rigondeaux – 45
9. Gennady Golovkin – 28
10T. Danny Garcia – 9
10T. Mikey Garcia – 9

2012 POLL

1. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 136 (7)
2. Andre Ward – 109 (1)
3. Juan Manuel Marquez – 82
4. Sergio Martinez – 76
5. Nonito Donaire – 53
6. Manny Pacquiao – 48
7. Wladimir Klitschko – 33
8. Vitali Klitschko – 18
9T. Timothy Bradley – 14
9T. Carl Froch – 14

2011 POLL

1. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 136.5 (6)
2. Manny Pacquiao – 127.5 (4)
3. Sergio Martinez – 80
4. Andre Ward – 65
5. Juan Manuel Marquez – 57
6. Nonito Donaire – 53
7. Wladimir Klitschko – 33
8T. Timothy Bradley – 19
8T. Pongsaklek Wonjongkam – 19
10. Lucian Bute – 11

2010 POLL

1. Manny Pacquiao – 150
2. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 117
3. Juan Manuel Marquez – 76
4. Sergio Martinez – 68
5. Andre Ward – 48
6. Nonito Donaire – 41
7. Tim Bradley – 27
8. Bernard Hopkins – 24
9. Juan Manuel Lopez – 21
10. Wladimir Klitschko – 20

2009 POLL

1. Manny Pacquiao – 144
2. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 126
3. Shane Mosley – 79
4. Bernard Hopkins – 61
5. Chad Dawson – 48
6. Paul Williams – 42
7. Juan Manuel Marquez – 40
8. Nonito Donaire – 22
9. Ivan Calderon – 15
10. Arthur Abraham – 14

2008 POLL

1. Manny Pacquiao – 150
2. Joe Calzaghe – 101
3. Juan Manuel Marquez – 99
4. Bernard Hopkins – 73
5. Antonio Margarito – 52
6. Israel Vazquez – 50
7. Rafael Marquez –31
8. Miguel Cotto – 28
9T. Ricky Hatton – 18
9T. Paul Williams – 18

2007 POLL

1. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 150
2. Manny Pacquiao – 103
3. Joe Calzaghe – 83
4. Bernard Hopkins – 63
5. Juan Manuel Marquez – 58
6. Miguel Cotto – 51
7. Israel Vazquez – 30
8. Kelly Pavlik – 21
9. Winky Wright – 15
10T. Juan Diaz – 13
10T. Oscar De La Hoya – 13

2006 POLL

1. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 141
2. Manny Pacquiao – 129
3. Winky Wright – 84
4. Jermain Taylor – 61
5. Joe Calzaghe – 49
6. Rafael Marquez – 28
7. Ricky Hatton – 23
8. Shane Mosley – 20
9. Jose Luis Castillo – 19
10. Bernard Hopkins – 16

2005 POLL

1. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 144
2. Winky Wright – 113
3. Marco Antonio Barrera – 70
4. Juan Manuel Marquez – 43
5. Rafael Marquez – 39
6. Ricky Hatton – 38
7. Jose Luis Castillo – 36
8. Jermain Taylor – 34
9. Zab Judah – 31
10. Antonio Tarver – 30

2004 POLL

1. Bernard Hopkins – 150
2. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 111
3. Kostya Tszyu – 88
4. Winky Wright – 70
5. Marco Antonio Barrera – 52
6. Manny Pacquiao – 38
7. Erik Morales – 26
8. Juan Manuel Marquez – 25
9. Felix Trinidad – 22
10T. Diego Corrales – 11
10T. Rafael Marquez –11

2003 POLL

1. Roy Jones – 142
2. Bernard Hopkins – 114
3. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 97
4. Shane Mosley – 53
5. Kostya Tszyu – 48
6. Oscar De La Hoya – 45
7. Manny Pacquiao – 38
8. James Toney – 35
9. Erik Morales – 31
10. Lennox Lewis – 22

2002 POLL

1. Roy Jones – 135
2. Oscar De La Hoya – 89
3T. Marco Antonio Barrera – 78
3T. Vernon Forrest – 78
3T. Bernard Hopkins – 78
6. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 45
7. Lennox Lewis – 43
8. Kostya Tszyu – 42
9. Erik Morales – 25
10. Shane Mosley – 13

2001 POLL

1. Shane Mosley – 132
2. Roy Jones – 108
3. Bernard Hopkins – 98
4. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 77
5. Marco Antonio Barrera – 44
6. Oscar De La Hoya – 40
7. Felix Trinidad – 39
8. Kostya Tszyu – 34
9. Lennox Lewis – 23
10. Ricardo Lopez – 22

2000 POLL

1. Felix Trinidad – 126
2. Shane Mosley – 123
3. Roy Jones – 109
4. Oscar De La Hoya – 43
5. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 39
6. Naseem Hamed – 37
7. Ricardo Lopez – 35
8. Diego Corrales – 33
9. Bernard Hopkins – 32
10. Lennox Lewis – 31

1999 POLL

1. Roy Jones – 150
2. Oscar De La Hoya – 85
3. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 78
4T. Shane Mosley – 68
4T. Felix Trinidad – 68
6T. Mark Johnson – 47
6T. Ricardo Lopez – 47
8. Erik Morales – 21
9. Bernard Hopkins – 16
10. Fernando Vargas – 15

1998 POLL

1. Roy Jones – 141
2. Oscar De La Hoya – 123
3. Felix Trinidad – 67
4. Shane Mosley – 65
5. Evander Holyfield – 55
6. Mark Johnson – 45
7. Naseem Hamed – 33
8. Ricardo Lopez – 23
9. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 19
10. Pernell Whitaker – 14

1997 POLL

1. Oscar De La Hoya – 123
2. Roy Jones – 117
3. Ricardo Lopez – 83
4. Evander Holyfield – 80
5. Felix Trinidad – 65
6. Pernell Whitaker – 37
7. Naseem Hamed – 28

8T. Mark Johnson – 22
8T. Junior Jones – 22
10. Johnny Tapia – 18

1996 POLL

1. Roy Jones – 123
2. Oscar De La Hoya – 107
3. Pernell Whitaker – 92
4. Evander Holyfield – 64
5. Felix Trinidad – 59
6. Ricardo Lopez – 56
7. Terry Norris – 28
8. Ike Quartey – 21
9. Azumah Nelson – 12
10. Yuri Arbachakov – 11

1995 POLL

1. Roy Jones – 138
2. Pernell Whitaker – 126
3. Oscar De La Hoya – 74
4. Felix Trinidad – 59
5. Marco Antonio Barrera – 48
6. Riddick Bowe – 44
7. Ricardo Lopez – 37
8. Julio Cesar Chavez – 18
9. Ike Quartey – 16
10. Naseem Hamed – 12

1994 POLL

1. Pernell Whitaker – 130
2. Roy Jones – 129
3. Frankie Randall – 53
4. Ricardo Lopez – 45
5. Orlando Canizales – 39
6. Chiquita Gonzalez – 38
7. James Toney – 36
8. Gerald McClellan – 33
9. Felix Trinidad –29
10. Kevin Kelley – 28

1993 POLL

1. Pernell Whitaker – 147
2. Julio Cesar Chavez – 86
3. Terry Norris – 84
4. James Toney – 76
5. Michael Carbajal – 39
6. Evander Holyfield – 36
7. Buddy McGirt – 28
8. Roy Jones – 23
9. Orlando Canizales – 22
10. Ricardo Lopez – 21

1992 POLL

1. Julio Cesar Chavez – 136
2. Terry Norris – 91
3. Pernell Whitaker – 85
4. Buddy McGirt – 60
5. Riddick Bowe – 45
6. Orlando Canizales – 36
7. Azumah Nelson –34
8. Lennox Lewis – 24
9. Julian Jackson – 18

10T. Roy Jones – 15
10T. Mike McCallum – 15

1991 POLL

1. Julio Cesar Chavez – 138
2. Pernell Whitaker – 100
3. Evander Holyfield – 78
4. Mike Tyson – 55
5. Meldrick Taylor – 48
6. Mike McCallum – 38
7. Thomas Hearns – 34
8. Khaosai Galaxy – 25
9. Terry Norris – 22
10. Simon Brown – 21

1990 POLL

1. Julio Cesar Chavez – 123
2. Pernell Whitaker – 104
3. Mike Tyson – 71
4. Meldrick Taylor – 57
5. Buster Douglas – 51
6. Simon Brown – 27
7. Antonio Esparragoza – 25
8. Michael Nunn – 23
9. Evander Holyfield – 21
10. Humberto Gonzalez – 14

1989 POLL

1. Mike Tyson – 147
2. Julio Cesar Chavez – 91
3. Meldrick Taylor – 61
4. Michael Nunn – 60
5. Evander Holyfield – 56
6. Pernell Whitaker – 46
7. Ray Leonard – 28
8. Jeff Fenech – 27
9. Azumah Nelson – 18
10. Marlon Starling – 16

1988 POLL

1. Mike Tyson – 144
2. Julio Cesar Chavez – 118
3. Evander Holyfield – 66
4. Ray Leonard – 55
5. Jeff Fenech – 44
6. Michael Nunn – 33
7. Azumah Nelson – 32
8. Jung-Koo Chang – 23
9. Buddy McGirt – 21
10. Sumbu Kalambay – 18

NO POLL IN 1987

1986 POLL

1. Marvin Hagler – 138
2. Mike Tyson – 92
3. Donald Curry – 59
4. Thomas Hearns – 52
5. Edwin Rosario – 47

6T. Azumah Nelson – 45
6T. Michael Spinks – 45
8. Evander Holyfield – 32
9. Julio Cesar Chavez – 26
10. Hector Camacho – 22

1985 POLL

1. Marvin Hagler – 150
2. Hector Camacho – 86
3. Michael Spinks – 85
4. Donald Curry – 78
5. Thomas Hearns – 42
6. Barry McGuigan – 32
7. Milton McCrory – 25

8T. Julio Cesar Chavez – 22
8T. Pinklon Thomas – 22
10. Larry Holmes – 21

1984 POLL

1. Marvin Hagler – 112
2. Aaron Pryor – 77
3. Larry Holmes –72
4. Eusebio Pedroza – 66
5. Hector Camacho – 50

6T. Jeff Chandler – 47
6T. Ray Leonard – 47
8. Michael Spinks – 45
9. Thomas Hearns – 34
10. Donald Curry – 26

1983 POLL

1. Marvin Hagler – 147
2. Aaron Pryor – 93
3. Larry Holmes – 91
4. Michael Spinks – 66
5. Jeff Chandler – 57
6. Thomas Hearns – 45
7. Alexis Arguello – 29
8. Wilfredo Gomez – 28
9. Hector Camacho – 24
10. Eusebio Pedroza – 12

1982 POLL

1. Ray Leonard – 147
2. Alexis Arguello – 97
3. Marvin Hagler – 76
4. Salvador Sanchez – 72
5. Wilfred Benitez – 68
6. Larry Holmes – 61
7. Jeff Chandler – 25
8. Eusebio Pedroza – 18
9. Aaron Pryor – 17

10T. Thomas Hearns – 14
10T. Dwight Muhammad Qawi – 14

1981 POLL

1. Thomas Hearns – 116
2. Ray Leonard – 108
3. Marvin Hagler –76
4. Larry Holmes – 75
5. Alexis Arguello – 62
6. Wilfredo Gomez – 58
7. Eddie Mustafa Muhammad –28
8. Matthew Saad Muhammad – 24
9. Wilfred Benitez – 18

10T. Roberto Duran – 13
10T. Aaron Pryor – 13

1980 POLL

1. Roberto Duran – 96
2. Ray Leonard – 93
3. Wilfredo Gomez – 88
4. Danny Lopez – 65
5. Pipino Cuevas – 54
6. Alexis Arguello – 40
7. Larry Holmes – 32
8. Wilfred Benitez – 26

9T. Vito Antuofermo – 25
9T. Matthew Saad Muhammad – 25

BY DAVID GREISMAN

HIGHLY UNOFFICIAL AWARDS

FIGHT THAT SHOULD'VE HAPPENED IN 2016, PART I
Canelo Alvarez vs. Gennady Golovkin.

FIGHT THAT SHOULD'VE HAPPENED IN 2016, PART II
Kell Brook vs. Amir Khan.

FIGHTS WE GOT INSTEAD
Canelo Alvarez vs. Amir Khan, Gennady Golovkin vs. Kell Brook.

WORST CAREER CHOICES
Billy Joe Saunders.

NUMBER OF PUNCHES CHARLES MARTIN LANDED IN WORLD TITLE WIN
26.

NUMBER OF PUNCHES THAT ACTUALLY WON MARTIN THE TITLE
Zero. Vyacheslav Glazkov injured his right knee while moving away from a left hand Martin landed in the third round, went down because of that injury a little later while throwing a right of his own and then dropped and was unable to continue after throwing another right. Glazkov was diagnosed with a dislocated right knee, as well as tears of his meniscus and ACL.

NUMBER OF PUNCHES MARTIN LANDED BEFORE LOSING HIS TITLE
Three. He lasted a mere five minutes just three months after his reign began, losing to Anthony Joshua by knockout.

SWIFTEST DAY IN BOXING
November 12, when welterweight titleholder Danny "Swift" Garcia stopped Samuel Vargas on the same card that saw junior middleweight prospect Jarrett "Swift" Hurd score a TKO of Jo Jo Dan. Elsewhere in the world that day, Stephen "Swifty" Smith lost a decision to 130-pound contender Jason Sosa.

DEAR JOHN AWARD
Junior lightweight titleholder Jezreel Corrales' first win, first loss and first no-contest came against Johnatan Calderon, Jhonatan Arenas and Jonathan Perez.

FLOYD MAYWEATHER JR. "MOST DISBELIEVED RETIREMENT" AWARD
Manny Pacquiao.

HOW OLD BERNARD HOPKINS WAS IN HIS FINAL FIGHT
51 years, 11 months and two days.

HOW OLD RUE MCCLANAHAN WAS WHEN "GOLDEN GIRLS" PREMIERED
51 years, six months and 24 days.

COMBINED RECORD OF THE THREE PRO BOXERS WHO FOUGHT IN THE 2016 OLYMPICS
66-3.

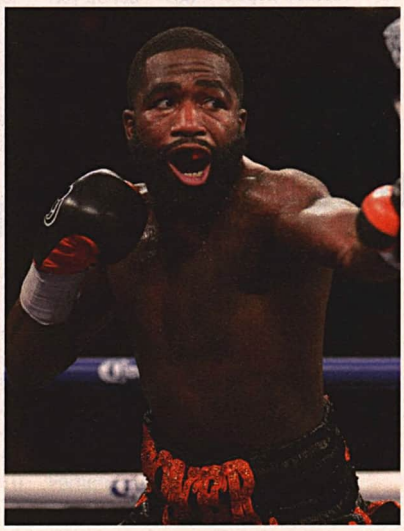
COMBINED RECORD OF THOSE THREE BOXERS DURING THE 2016 OLYMPICS
2-3.

THE BIG LEBOWSKI "GUNS AND BOWLING" AWARD
Adrien Broner went into his title defense against Ashley Theophane with a warrant out for his arrest for allegedly beating and robbing a man outside of a bowling alley after losing a bet inside.

MOST FITTING TV PROGRAMMING
Broner-Theophane was preceded and followed by episodes of "Cops."

REASON ADRIEN BRONER LOST HIS JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHT TITLE
He came in 0.4 pounds overweight for the Theophane bout, refused to drop the remaining weight and said he couldn't make 140 anymore.

WEIGHT CLASS FOR BRONER'S NEXT FIGHT
140.



TONY BELLEW'S ADONIS REALITY
He was stopped by light heavyweight champion Adonis Stevenson in 2013.

TONY BELLEW'S ADONIS FICTION
Portraying light heavyweight champion "Pretty" Ricky Conlan, he edged Adonis Creed in 2015.

FIGHTER MOST LIKELY TO GET LICKED
Flyweight contender Stamp Kiatniwat.

NOT YET LIKELY TO BE REMEMBERED
Junior welterweight prospect Yomar Alamo.

BEST NICKNAME MATCHMAKING
James "Chunky" DeGale defending his super middleweight world title last April against Rogelio "Porky" Medina.

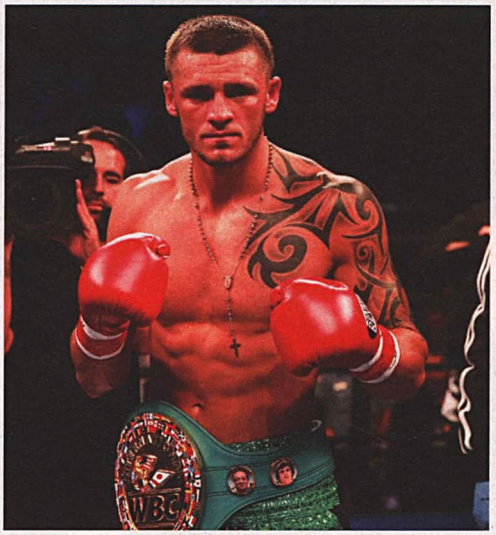
SHOULD'VE BEEN ON THE SAME CARD
Junior middleweight Liam "Beefy" Smith.

SHOULD'VE BEEN THE GUEST REFEREE
Tony Tubbs.

THE BIGGEST UPSET THAT DID HAPPEN
Guys named "Chunky" and "Porky" making weight.

THE BIG UPSET THAT ALMOST HAPPENED
Medina giving DeGale a much tougher fight than the scorecards indicated.

WILL THERE BE A REMATCH BETWEEN CHUNKY AND PORKY?
Fat chance.



SMITH OF THE YEAR
Joe.

GEORGE FOREMAN "ALL MY CHILDREN" AWARD
Gary Russell Sr., who has six sons named Gary, four of whom box, including featherweight titleholder Gary Russell Jr.

GARY RUSSELL OF THE YEAR
Gary Antuanne Russell, a junior welterweight who made it to the quarterfinals of the 2016 Olympics.

NOT THE BIGGEST SURPRISE
Evander Holyfield was voted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

THE BIGGER SURPRISE
Holyfield stayed retired long enough to be eligible.

WHAT FLOYD MAYWEATHER JR. PAYS FOR HAIRCUTS
$1,000 a session, two or three sessions a week.

WHAT A MACH 3 RAZOR AND A CAN OF GILLETTE SHAVING CREAM COST
Less than $10.

SOUNDS LIKE AMAZING NEWS
DeMarcus "Chop Chop" Corley, at age 44, earned $2 million in Jamaica by winning four fights in a 16-boxer tournament.

BUT NOT QUITE THAT AMAZING
That grand prize of 2 million Jamaican dollars equals less than $16,000 in the United States.

TWO SIGNS YOU'RE NOT WINNING A DECISION
Your opponent is featherweight Guy Robb and one of the judges is Tim Cheatham.

ROBERTO DURAN "ANIMAL PUNCHER" AWARD
Retired featherweight Rick Nelson, 61, needed just two punches to fend off an attacking bear in Northern Ontario.

MEANWHILE IN BOXING ...
While a featherweight will punch a bear for free, no top middleweights fought Gennady Golovkin in 2016.

STRANGEST BOXING TRUNKS
John Molina's garb for his junior welterweight fight with Ruslan Provodnikov was inspired by the "Back to the Future" movies. At least he won. Later in the year, Terence Crawford made Molina look like a Marty McFlyweight.

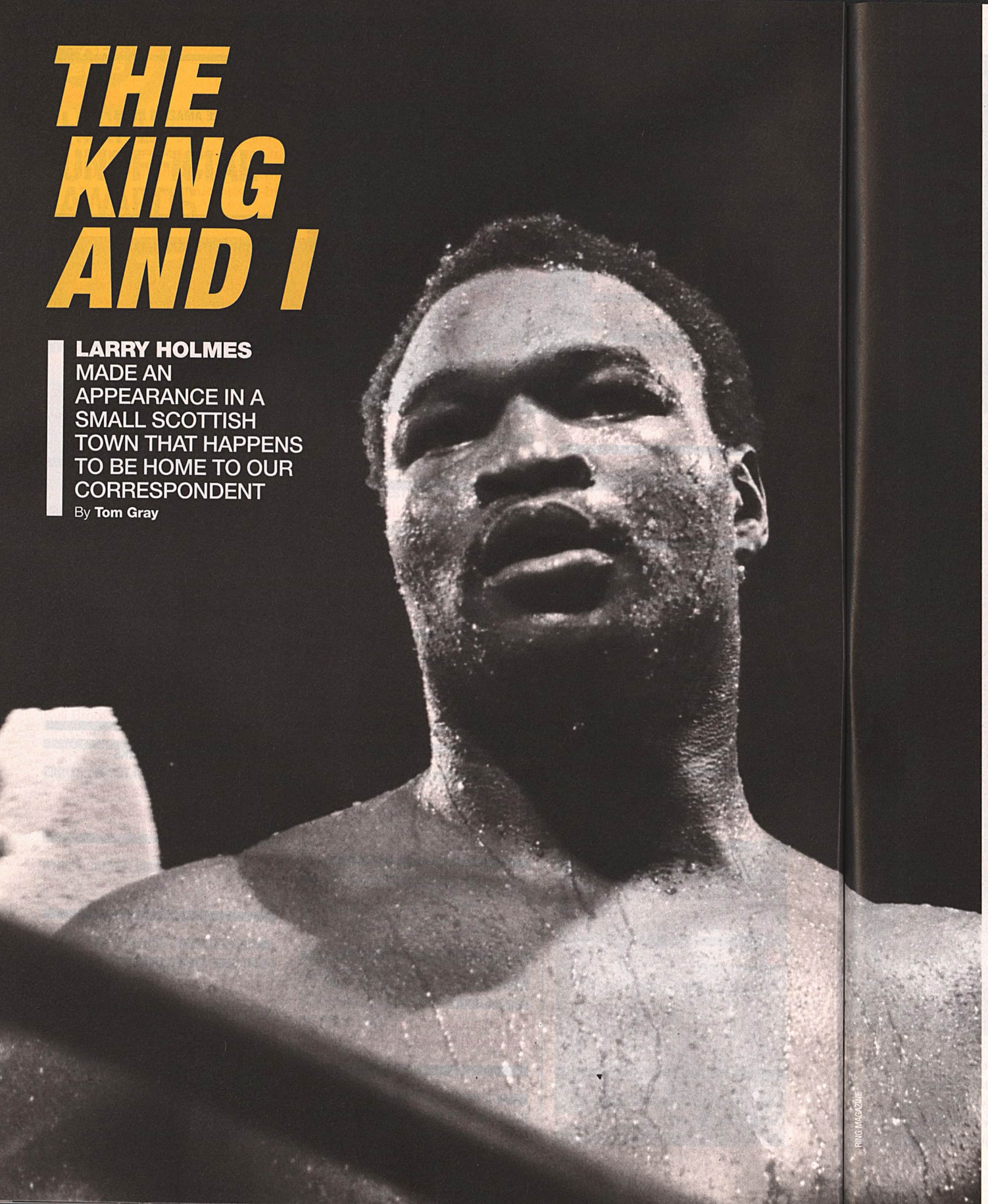
JOSHUA CLOTTEY "BAD BEEF STEW" AWARD
Francisco Vargas blamed the dish, cooked by his mother, for a positive drug test ahead of his fight with Orlando Salido. ★

FOR PAST WINNERS OF THE ANNUAL RING AWARDS, GO TO http://bit.do/past-ring-awards OR SCAN THE QR CODE.

THE KING AND I

LARRY HOLMES MADE AN APPEARANCE IN A SMALL SCOTTISH TOWN THAT HAPPENS TO BE HOME TO OUR CORRESPONDENT

By **Tom Gray**



RING MAGAZINE

"Have you ever been in Motherwell, Larry?"

It wasn't yours truly asking that question. This was an icebreaker from the master of ceremonies at the Dalziel Park Hotel in Motherwell, Scotland. Larry Holmes, the legendary former heavyweight champion who ruled the glamour division with an iron jab for almost 7½ years, was in attendance as special guest and a crowd of 100 or so fans greeted him enthusiastically.

Motherwell, which is about 15 miles outside of Glasgow, just happens to be my hometown. In September, I'd found out that Holmes would be stopping off here during his U.K. tour and immediately went into overdrive in the hope of arranging an interview. I called his office. No dice. I called his house. No answer. I called his cellphone. Bingo.

"Larry?"

"Yeah!"

"It's Tom Gray from RING Magazine. You're coming to Scotland, right?"

"Yeah, I'm coming there to kick all your asses!"

"Larry, you're not only coming to Scotland, you're coming to Motherwell and that's where I live. I need to see you. I need an interview. Help me!"

"Great, I'll kick your ass first!"

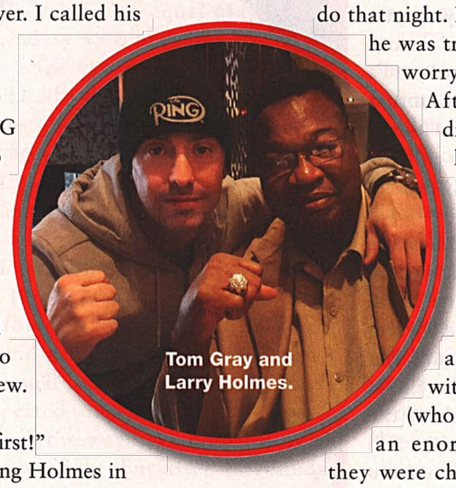
The first time I recall seeing Holmes in action was in the early 1990s. A friend came to my house with a video called "Champions Forever," and within 90 minutes I'd gone from boxing fan to boxing super-freak. The documentary focused on the five-way rivalry between Muhammad Ali, Joe Frazier, George Foreman, Ken Norton and Holmes. If you haven't seen it, then you owe yourself a treat because this is as good as it gets.

Ali is the main player during the feature and I marveled at his talent. I'd never seen such speed and grace in a boxing ring. Sonny Liston humiliated twice. Frazier beaten twice. Norton beaten twice. Foreman schooled. Revenge over Leon Spinks. Hold up! Who is this guy beating the living s--- out of Ali in Las Vegas? It was Larry Holmes.

I couldn't stand the guy who had ruined my new hero, ruined the ending to a great documentary and ruined my entire day. And I couldn't get the images of a faded Ali being picked apart out of my head for weeks.

Holmes has heard anecdotes similar to this one for decades. The morning after his encounter with Scottish boxing fans, he knowingly nodded his head at the breakfast table before addressing the hate campaign that fans waged against him following his 11th-round stoppage of Ali in October 1980. "I paid it no mind," said the former champion. "As much as I cared about Muhammad Ali, it was still him or me. I wanted to make sure that he didn't beat me up, so I had to beat him up.

"I was mean when I had to be mean. I could turn it on and turn it off, and I did what I had to do that night. If Ali made me mad, which he was trying to do in the fight, I'd worry about beating up on him. Afterwards, I went to his dressing room to make sure he was alright. If I didn't care, then I wouldn't have done that.



Tom Gray and Larry Holmes.

"The man had helped me and did a lot of things for me. Ali gave me a job (as a sparring partner) and I spent quality time with him. Ali and Joe Frazier (who Holmes also sparred) were an enormous influence because they were champions and I wanted to be around champions. I wanted to see what champions could do and how they acted. I wanted to be around people I admired."

I had no admiration for Holmes whatsoever for a long time but I was hooked on the sport. I began collecting fights: Ali, Frazier, Foreman, Norton, Joe Louis, Sugar Ray Robinson, Sugar Ray Leonard, Marvelous Marvin Hagler, Thomas Hearns, Roberto Duran, Julio Cesar Chavez, Pernell Whitaker. Anyone not named Larry Holmes.

This was long before the internet arrived and the comfort blanket of YouTube was about 15 years away. If you wanted to see boxing at its best, then you sent for VHS video tapes. And that was not cheap. Opportunists could charge £20 ($30) for a bootlegged three-hour tape. Sometime you would get lucky and the quality would be excellent. Sometimes you had to squint your eyes to view an eighth-generation copy.

Holmes punched his way back into my boxing obsession when I came across a book named "Serenity," which was written by the late Ralph Wiley and published in 1989. I had read all

Larry Holmes evolved from the man who pummeled Muhammad Ali into a legend.

Holmes is able to reminisce effortlessly even after a long career.

nine chapters, some 230 pages, at Motherwell Library but I wanted to take it home. The library refused to sell it, so I had my mother borrow the book and conveniently forgot to take it back. Fortunately for me, the library was undergoing renovation and was at a temporary address. When they were back up and running, my infringement had gone unnoticed. I was officially a thief.

Although he covered far more wide-reaching topics, as well as other sports, Wiley was a terrific boxing guy. He remains one of the finest writers I have ever come across. Every chapter in "Serenity" is engrossing and the one on Holmes, entitled "A Workman's Compensation," forced me to turn a corner. If Wiley appreciated Holmes and spoke of him with such glowing admiration, then I was clearly making a mistake by ignoring that.

I ordered tapes of Holmes for months: Norton, heavyweight hellfire to win the WBC title in June 1978; Earnie Shavers, schooled twice; Ossie Ocasio, decked by a jab; Tim Witherspoon, arguably the finest heavyweight boxing match of the 1980s. Hell, I even purchased a full copy of the Ali fight, so there was no holding back now.

The performance I most enjoyed, however, was Holmes' third-round destruction of Leon Spinks, which took place in June 1981 in Detroit. I'd watched Ali split two 15-round fights with Spinks from 1978, but even though he'd regained the WBA heavyweight title in the rematch, "The Greatest" was clearly over the hill and rolling down the other side.

Holmes, by comparison, was punch-perfect and did to Spinks what a younger version of Ali would have.

"Leon always stayed right in front of you and all I had to do was time him moving his head on the way in," said Holmes, as he mimicked Spinks' side-to-side defense. "As soon as he moved his head to his right, I nailed him with the right hand and that was that.

"I dedicated myself to kicking his ass because I didn't like him. I was at a dinner (before the fight) and my wife wanted Joe Louis' (signed) boxing gloves that were on our table. (Spinks) came over from his table, took the gloves and said he wouldn't give them back. I beat his ass for that but I felt bad afterwards."

If "Neon Leon" was Holmes' finest performance, then what was his best moment as champion? For me, it's difficult to see past Gerry Cooney. Holmes may not have been blessed with hordes of Hall of Fame opponents during his championship run but he took on several of the best big men in the world. The unbeaten Cooney, a left-hook destroyer, was "The Great White Hope" and a major threat to the title.

Holmes' impressive 13th-round stoppage of Cooney bolstered his resume but "The Easton Assassin" had liquidated much more than a gutsy challenger. He overcame a repulsive undercurrent of racism. He overcame death threats. He overcame the disrespect of being introduced first during pre-fight pageantry. He overcame two shocking scorecards that had the fight close after 12 rounds (113-111 Holmes) even though he scored a knockdown and Cooney was deducted three points for low blows.

If Ali had "shook up the world" like that against Cooney, the fight would have been the subject of a Hollywood movie a long time ago. "Gerry was the big white guy who could punch and everyone was betting on him," recalled Holmes with a smile. "I'd fought at Caesars Palace many times and the gamblers were usually all for me. Suddenly, Gerry Cooney comes in and takes over the whole town. What happened to Larry Holmes? Oh, he's gonna get his butt kicked. Just put him in the back."

When I asked if that fired him up, Holmes leaned forward. "No, that's what they wanted," he hissed. "They wanted me to lose my cool so that I would go in there and lose the fight. All those rumors about the president (Ronald Reagan) wanting to call Cooney in the dressing room if he won. I didn't care about any of that. If you want to congratulate him, then congratulate him on his ass whipping because that's all he's gonna get."

Holmes successfully defended his heavyweight championship 20 times. In 1983, he relinquished the WBC title after negotiations with mandatory challenger Greg Page collapsed but quickly aligned himself with the newly formed IBF. Holmes would remain the RING and linear heavyweight champion until September 1985.

When I viewed a worn-out copy of light heavyweight champion Michael Spinks outpointing Holmes over 15 rounds, I was left unfulfilled. It had been a poor fight, although the real fireworks came afterward when a devastated Holmes infamously stated that Rocky Marciano couldn't carry his jockstrap. "The Rock" had been the subject of Holmes' wrath because he had failed to equal Marciano's legendary 49-0 unbeaten streak by one single victory. Holmes was being heckled by the late champ's family at a post-fight press conference and he hit back — hard.

Despite now being a former champion, Holmes bowed down to no one.

I obviously knew the result of the Michael Spinks rematch before viewing it, but as each round passed, my confusion grew. A much more aggressive Holmes appeared to be kicking "The Jinx's" ass all the way back down to light heavyweight, but after 15 rounds the judges found a way to deprive him. Spinks claimed a controversial split decision in April 1986.

Holmes, remarkably, would fight on for another 16 years and compete for the heavyweight championship on three more occasions. He lost by knockout (for the only time in his career) to Mike Tyson and dropped decisions to Evander Holyfield and Oliver McCall. He retired at the age of 52 years old with a final record of 69-6 (44 knockouts).

Would he have continued had the Spinks rematch gone his way?

"I really don't know because I fought for money," Holmes said after some deliberation. "I didn't fight to be the heavyweight champion of the world. I didn't fight to say I kicked someone's ass. I didn't fight for bragging rights. I got into fighting to make money, and while it's great to be heavyweight champion of the world, it ain't great being broke.

"If you're broke, you get called a broke champion. If you're rich, they call you a rich champion. Who wants to be a broke champion? I wanted to go in the ring and get out with some money in my pocket. I wanted money that would last me for the rest of my life and so far I'm doing it. I've got a few more years to go. I just turned 67 years old and what amazes me is that I can do just as much as anybody else. I don't feel that boxing affected me."

It didn't. Holmes effortlessly reminisces about fights from as early as 1973 – in detail. The sport that changed his life, gave him greatness and provided an immortal legacy has left no ill effects. The former champion is not in perfect health, however. He has been battling Type 2 diabetes since 2013, but with the help of his loving wife of 36 years, Diane, and the support of his family, he is taking every precaution to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

I have been lucky enough to interview some great fighters: Frazier, Foreman, Leonard, Duran, Hagler, Hopkins, De La Hoya, Lewis, among others. This breakfast-time interview with Holmes, however, will always be with me for a different reason. Unlike the other Hall of Fame fighters I've encountered, I once looked upon Holmes with disdain but grew to appreciate him as much as any champion who has yet lived.

To fans, his body of work is like an expensive painting that becomes more valuable with each passing year.

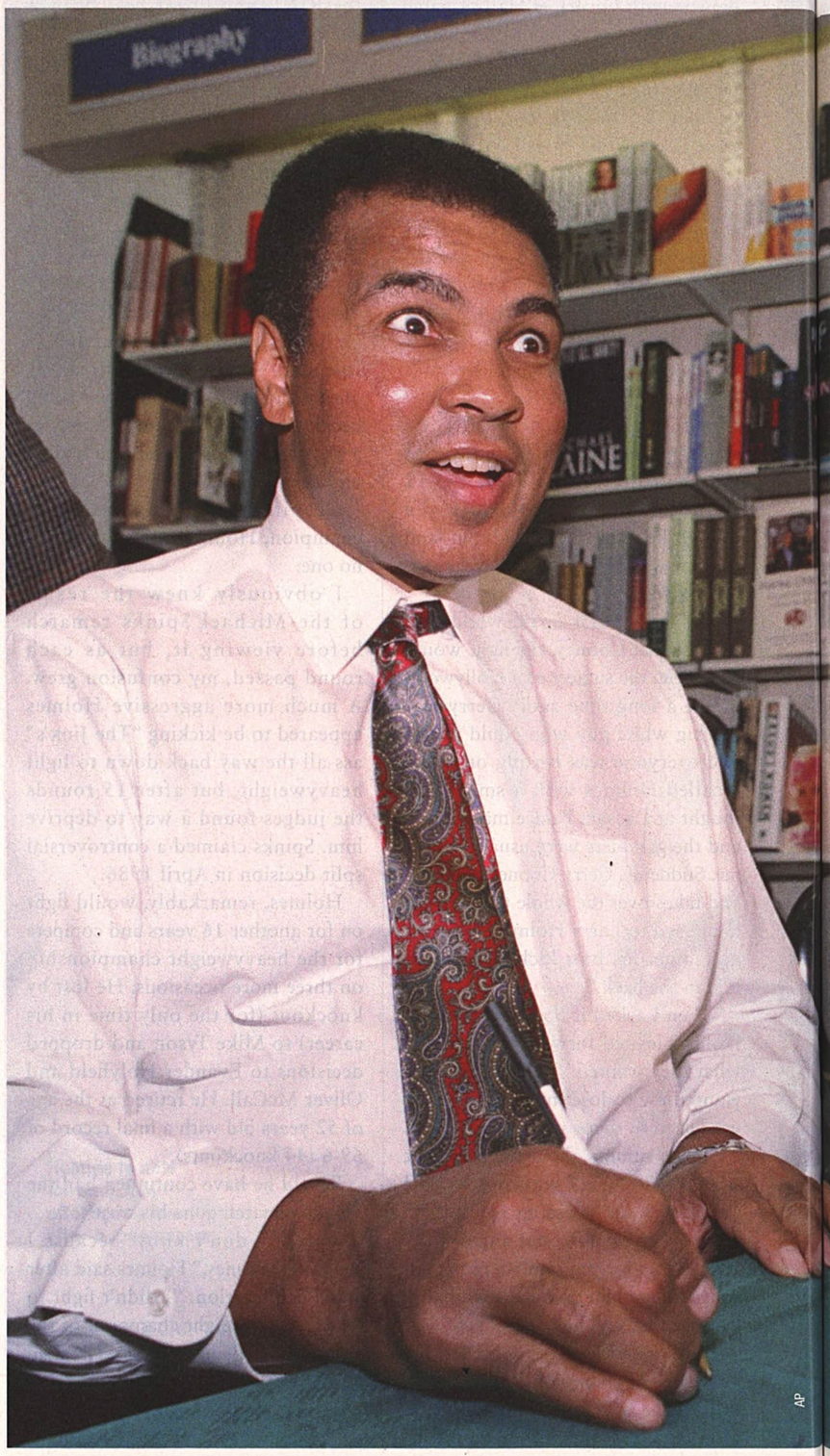
From countless hours of VHS video, to halcyon days at the local library, my journey with "The Easton Assassin" went full circle and ended with a one-on-one encounter just minutes away from where it all began for me, almost 25 years ago.

Tom Gray is a U.K. Correspondent/ Editor for RingTV.com and a member of THE RING ratings panel. Follow him on Twitter: @Tom_Gray_Boxing

HOWARD BINGHAM: A REMEMBRANCE

MUHAMMAD ALI'S BEST FRIEND WAS, THE GREAT FIGHTER SAID, "THE BEST THERE IS"

By **Thomas Hauser**



AP

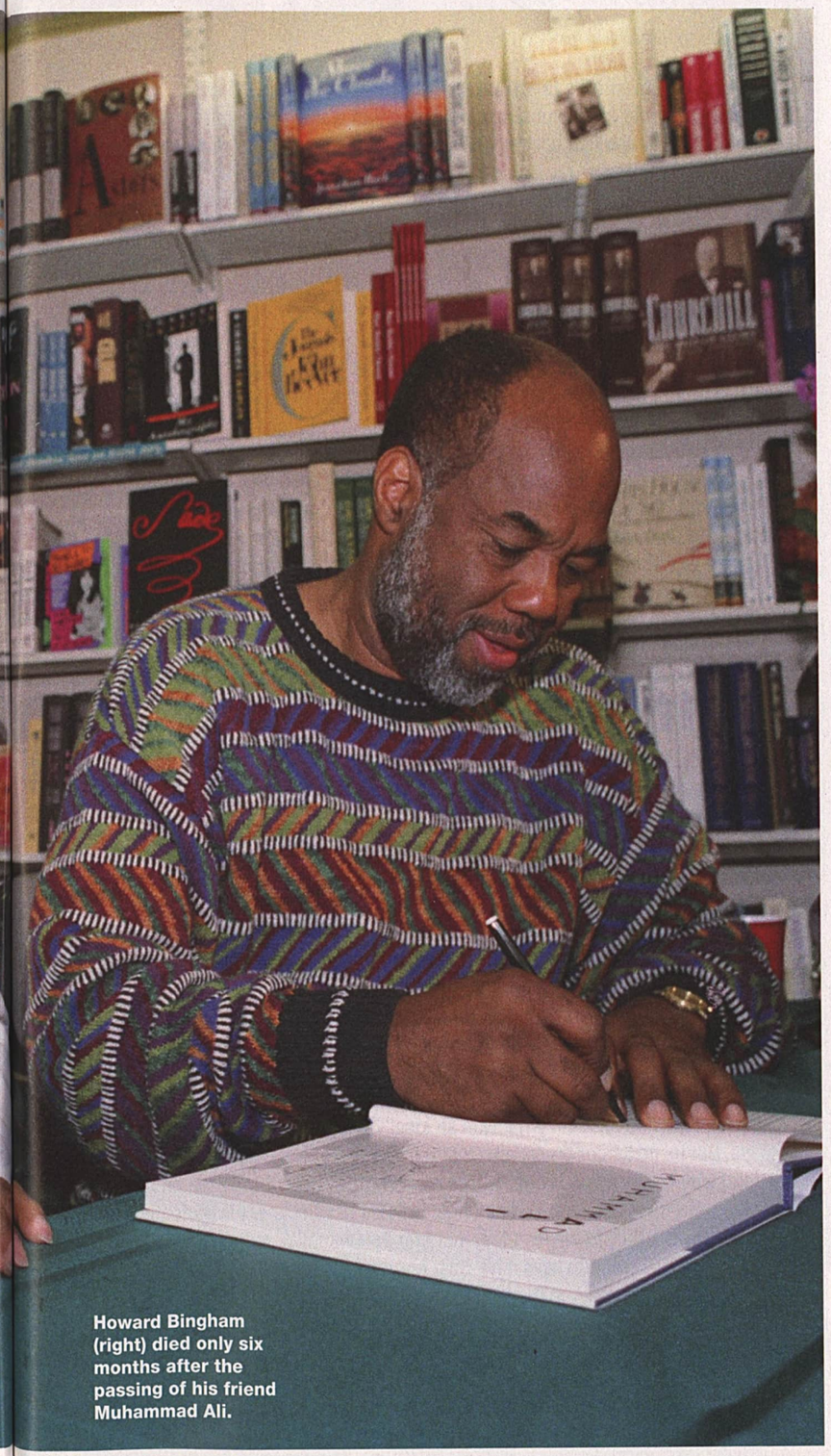
Howard Bingham, who died on December 15, was Muhammad Ali's truest, most trusted, loyal friend.

Bingham was born in Jackson, Mississippi, on May 29, 1939. For most of his life, he was a freelance photographer. Over the decades, he took more than 500,000 photos of Ali. If Muhammad was Don Quixote, then Howard was his Sancho Panza.

Years ago, Bingham told me how his relationship with Ali began.

"I was with a black newspaper in Los Angeles called The Sentinel," Howard said. "My assignment that day was to cover Ali at a news conference to announce an [April 23, 1962] fight at the Los Angeles Sports Arena against George Logan. I'd never heard of Cassius Clay, which was his name at the time. But I went to the news conference, introduced myself, took a couple of photos and left. Then, that afternoon, I was driving downtown and saw these two guys on the corner of Fifth and Broadway, Cassius Clay and his brother Rudolph. I asked if they wanted a ride someplace because it looked like they were waiting for a bus, and they said no. They were just watching the girls go by. So I asked if they'd like to take a ride with me. They got in the car, and I had some errands to do. Then I took them by a bowling alley, to my mother's house and a couple of other places, and we hit it off good."

"That was in the spring," Bingham continued. "Ali came back to Los Angeles a couple of months later to fight Alejandro Lavorante, and then again at the end of the year for Archie Moore. Both times, I showed him around. He and Angelo [Dundee] offered me money to be a press secretary or guide and I did all that stuff, but I never took the money. It wasn't something I wanted to get paid for. As far as I was concerned, we were friends. Then, on New Year's Day 1963, Ali called me up and asked if I wanted to come to Miami and hang out with him for a while. I said yeah. I'd never been on an airplane before. I arrived in Miami on a Sunday night. Ali met me at the airport, and the next morning we drove to Louisville to his parents' home. After that, we went to Pittsburgh, where he had a fight against Charlie Powell. I'd never been in cold weather before, so he bought me earmuffs, an overcoat and long underwear."



Howard Bingham (right) died only six months after the passing of his friend Muhammad Ali.

I met Howard Bingham in 1988. Muhammad had married Lonnie Williams two years earlier. There was talk of a new biography that would update Ali's life story and correct errors propagated by a faux autobiography – "The Greatest: My Own Story" – that had been written by Richard Durham and published in 1976. My name had come up as a prospective biographer. I was in Los Angeles on a business trip. Howard met me at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel to check me out. Apparently, I passed the test because, in October 1988, I was called to a meeting in New York with Muhammad and Lonnie.

"Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times" followed. Howard was crucial to the researching and writing of the book. He set up interviews, educated me on the nuances of Ali's life and defended me against attacks from Herbert Muhammad (Ali's former manager, who was trying to torpedo the project because he didn't have a financial interest in the book or control over it). He was my guardian angel.

When the first draft of the manuscript was complete, Muhammad, Lonnie, Howard and I gathered at the Alis' home in Berrien Springs, Michigan, to read every word aloud. By agreement, there was to be no censorship. The purpose of our reading was to ensure that the book was factually accurate. Lonnie and I did all the reading, with one exception.

HOWARD BINGHAM: A REMEMBRANCE

I had told Muhammad that I wanted to dedicate the book to Howard.

Ali was pleased. "I'm glad you understand how good Howard is," he said.

On day one of our reading, I asked Muhammad to read the dedication.

Ali stood up, cleared his throat, and very clearly read, "For Howard Bingham, there's no one like him."

"That's a joke, right?" Howard said.

Muhammad shook his head and showed Howard the dedication page.

Howard began to cry.

Later that day, we came to a quote in the manuscript that put the dedication in context.

"Everybody says I love people," Muhammad's tribute to his friend read. "So it's only fair that I have the best friend in the world, and that's Howard Bingham. He never asks for anything. He's always there when someone needs him. There's no one like him. He's the best there is. And if you write that, I don't want Howard to think I'm getting soft, so write down that he's lucky I'm his friend, too. And tell him I said I'm the only person in the world who likes him."

The endgame for Howard wasn't pretty. His final years were spent in an assisted living facility because of cognitive issues. Then doctors discovered cancer that had metastasized throughout his body. In April of last year, his oldest son died. On June 3, Ali left this world to join the immortals.

Howard's bottom line was always what was best for Muhammad. Wherever they are now, I hope they're together. RING

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thauser@rcn.com. His most recent book – "A Hard World: An Inside Look at Another Year in Boxing" – was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism.

LONNIE ALI: 'THIS PHOTOGRAPH MAKES ME CRY'

By Thomas Hauser

When Muhammad Ali's longtime friend Howard Bingham died in December, I wrote a remembrance of Howard that was posted on RingTV.com with the photograph that accompanies this article. Since then, I've received a number of comments regarding the photo, including one from Lonnie Ali, Muhammad's wife, who wrote, "Oh my! This photograph makes me cry."

The photo came about by accident rather than design.

While researching and writing "Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times," I spent considerable time in 1988, 1989 and 1990 at the Alis' home in Berrien Springs, Michigan. Howard always joined us.

I realized early on that straightforward Q&A sessions wouldn't elicit much new information from Muhammad. The best way to research was to hang out with him, carry pen and paper at all times and write down whatever came my way. That might happen while we were watching old Ali fights on television, talking about interviews I'd conducted for the book or simply conversing in the course of Muhammad's everyday routine.

Muhammad was in his late 40s then and healthier than he would ever be again. He was having trouble coordinating the muscles he used in speech but was able to communicate well on most occasions. His physical tremors were becoming more pronounced, but he was still stronger than most men his age. He'd decided to get into better shape. That led to his losing 20 pounds, in part by taking long walks each day.

I'm not a gifted photographer. Never was; never will be. But I thought it would be nice to have some photos that memorialized my trips to Berrien Springs. And I wanted a photo of Howard, who'd become a friend. So I brought a disposable Kodak Instamatic camera with me on one of my visits.

On the day in question, Muhammad, Howard and I went for a walk that lasted well over two hours. From time to time, I stopped to take notes. Muhammad and Howard would keep walking. When I finished writing, I'd run to catch up with them. In one of those moments, I liked the way that Muhammad and Howard looked together. So I snapped a photo from behind. More than a quarter-century later, the image still speaks to me.

Muhammad and Howard aren't touching, but there's a closeness between them. They're relaxed and comfortable with each other.

Howard is carrying two cameras. He always had cameras when he was with Muhammad, and most other times as well. Like the rest of us, Howard liked freebies. Thus, the jacket from the Mirage. He's physically strong and striding forward.

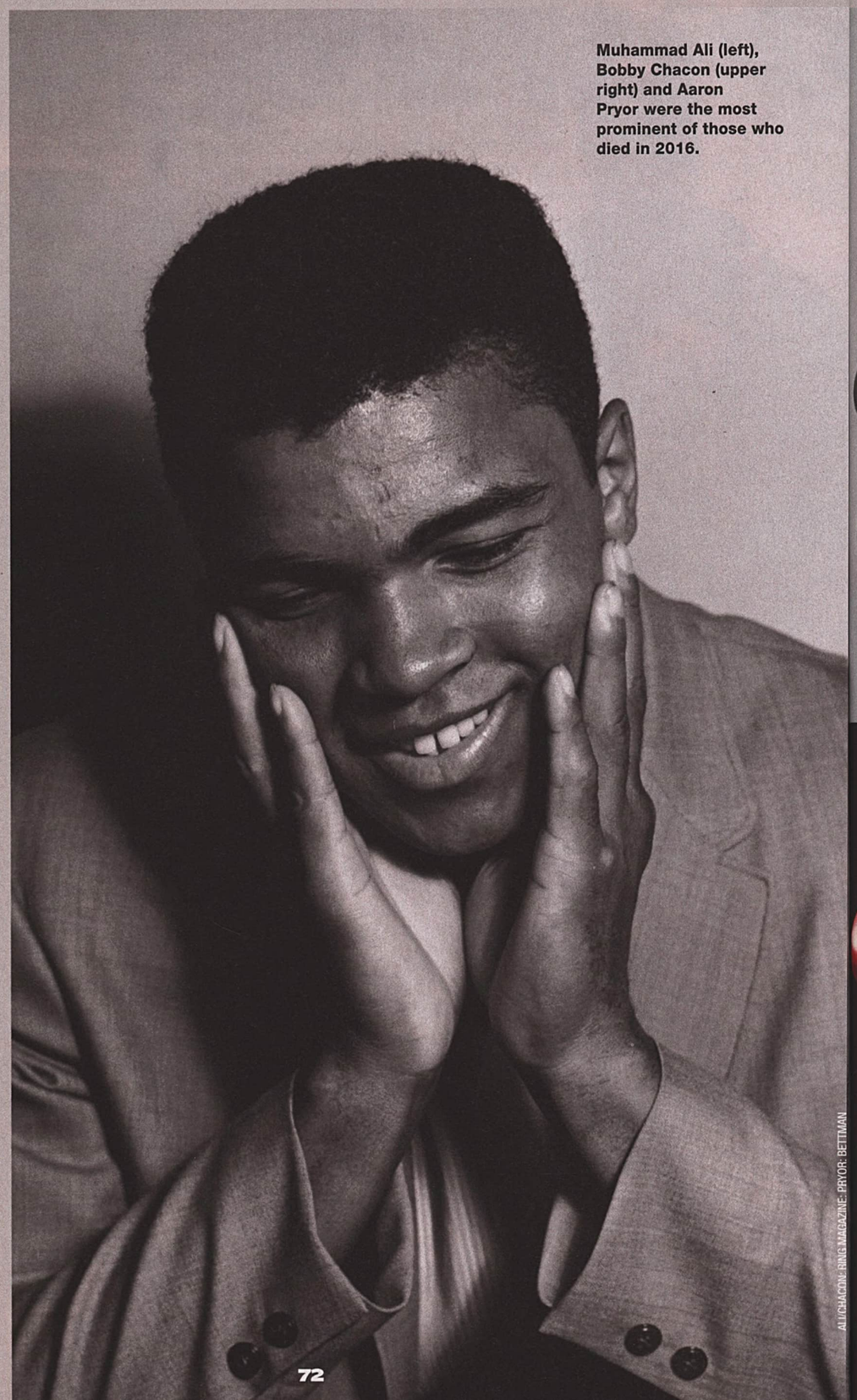
Muhammad had reached what was an ideal weight for him at that time in his life. But he no longer floated like a butterfly. His feet are close together and not well-balanced as he walks. The phrase "Ali shuffle" has taken on new meaning. His shoulders are a bit stooped. Howard has become his protector.

Then, as now, they're walking together into the unknown. In the words of Lonnie Ali, "The picture says it all. Best friends forever. I can see them in heaven, walking together in the same way. Howard always at Muhammad's side, never leaving him to make the journey alone. Some pictures of Muhammad, I can't look at without becoming very emotional. This is one of them. I wish I could move time back to when this picture was taken and enjoy their company once more. I'd probably kiss Muhammad's cheeks raw and hug Howard so tight he couldn't breathe. My two best friends are gone." ★

Ali (right) and Bingham were often side by side.

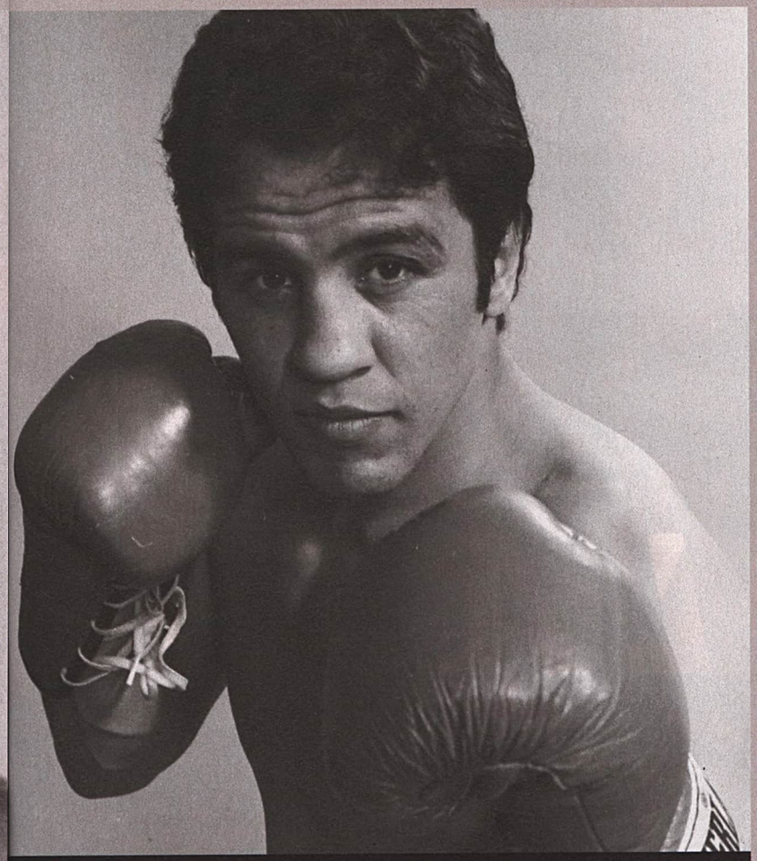
IN MEMORIAM

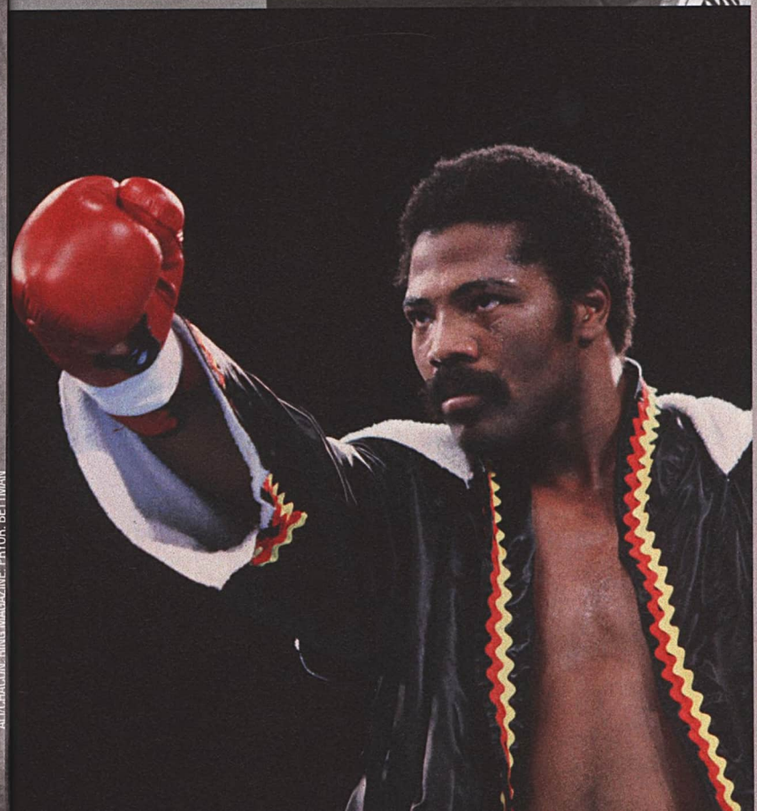
BOXING PERSONALITIES WE LOST IN 2016



Muhammad Ali (left), Bobby Chacon (upper right) and Aaron Pryor were the most prominent of those who died in 2016.

ALI: CHACON: RING MAGAZINE; PRYOR: BETTMAN





Muhammad Ali – Former three-time heavyweight champion

Jose Becerra – Former world bantamweight champion

Jack Bodell – Former British, Commonwealth and European heavyweight titleholder

Ed Brown – Unbeaten welterweight contender

Tony Burton – Heavyweight fighter in the 1950s and actor in "Rocky" series

Bobby Chacon – Former two-division world titleholder

Gilbert Chapron – 1956 Olympic bronze medal winner for France

Joe Chavez – Celebrated cutman and boxing trainer

Alex De Jesus – Junior welterweight contender

Dai Dower – Former British, Commonwealth and European flyweight titleholder

Perico Fernandez – Former WBC junior welterweight titleholder

Nicholas Gargano – 1956 Olympic bronze medal winner for Great Britain

Richie Giachetti – Celebrated boxing trainer

Freddie Gilroy – 1956 Olympic bronze medal winner for Ireland and Former British, Commonwealth and European titleholder

Alejandro Gonzalez Jr. – Junior featherweight contender

Adolfo Horta – 1980 Olympic silver medal winner for Cuba

Shigeji Kaneko – Defeated future Hall of Famer Flash Elorde four times

Chris Kenny – New Zealand amateur coach who trained fighters for Olympic competition

Gilberto Mendoza Sr. – Former president of the WBA

Remigio Molina – Two-time world title challenger

Carlos Morocho Hernandez – Former junior welterweight titleholder

Walter McGowan – Former flyweight titleholder

Bill McMurray – Heavyweight contender in the 1960s who mixed with the best

Aaron Pryor – Former junior welterweight champion

Des Rea – First holder of the British junior welterweight title

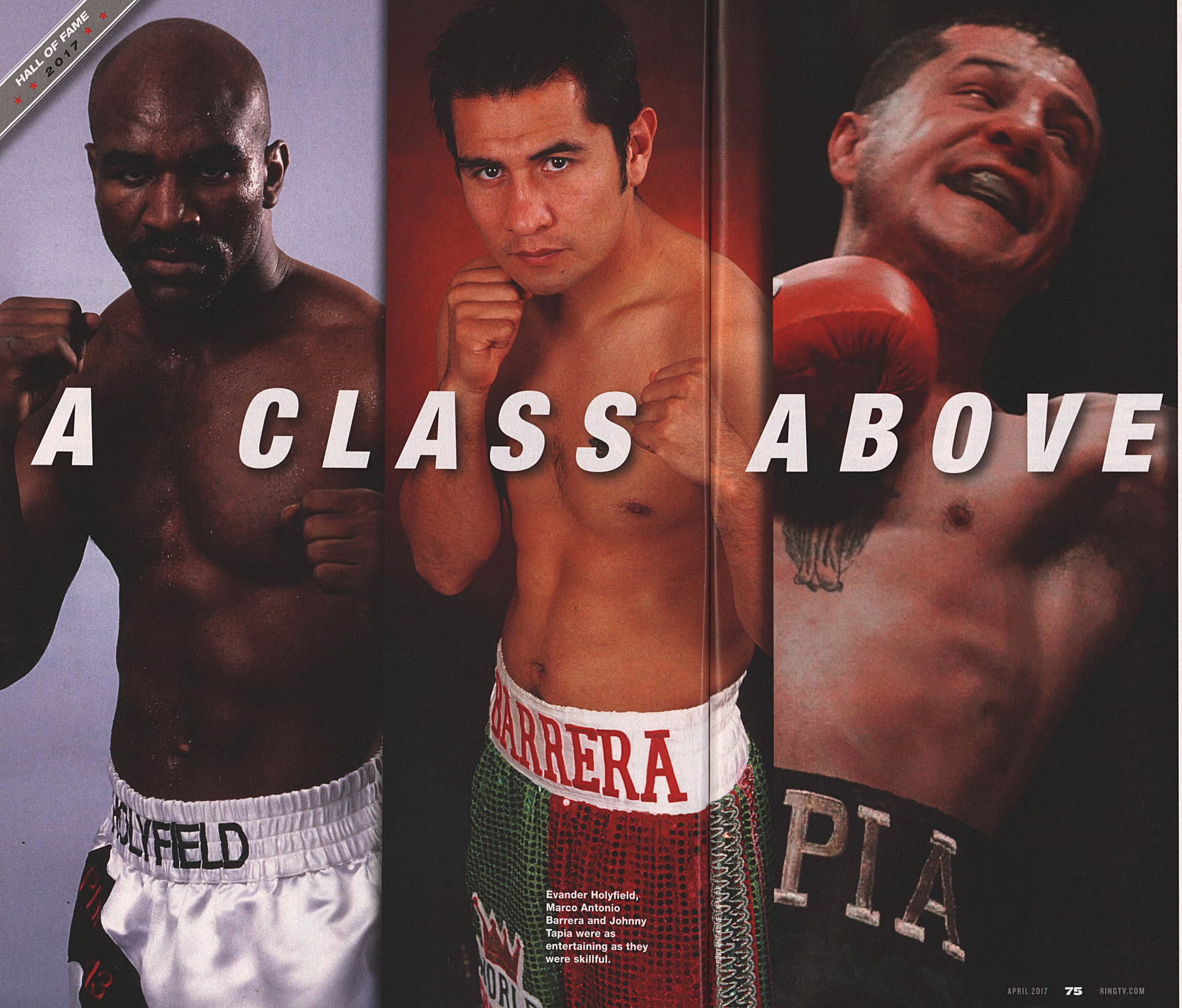
Wieslaw Rudkowski – 1972 Olympic silver medalist for Poland

Roger Stafford – Former world title challenger

Alex Stewart – Heavyweight contender from the 1980s and '90s

Mike Towell – Welterweight prospect

Arthur Tunstall – Celebrated Australian amateur boxing administrator



Evander Holyfield, Marco Antonio Barrera and Johnny Tapia were as entertaining as they were skillful.

EVANDER HOLYFIELD, MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA AND JOHNNY TAPIA WON FIGHTS AND THE HEARTS OF FANS

By **Michael Rosenthal**

The credentials of the International Boxing Hall of Fame Class of 2017 are first-rate. Evander Holyfield, Marco Antonio Barrera and Johnny Tapia knew their stuff, as each was a skillful boxer.

The careers of all three also were defined by something nearer and dearer to the hearts of fans, though – their take-no-prisoners mentalities. They were must-see TV every time out, meaning they were among the most popular fighters of their era. It's no surprise that they took part in a combined five RING Fights of the Year.

Holyfield (44-10-2, 29 knockouts) made the biggest impact, as he became the only fighter to win the heavyweight title four times over a career that lasted almost 27 years.

"The Real Deal" got off to a slow start – losing out on a gold medal in the 1984 Olympics when he was disqualified for knocking out Kevin Barry after he was told to break – but soared after that disappointment.

Holyfield combined a solid fundamental foundation with punching power and overwhelming ferocity to become one of the sport's great figures. He is recognized as the best cruiserweight ever – going 18-0 (14 knockouts) and becoming unified champion – but was only getting started.

From the day he knocked out Buster Douglas in three rounds to win the world championship in 1990 to 2008, when some believe he was cheated out of a decision in his final title fight, against Nikolay Valuev, he was at the center of heavyweight boxing.

Along the way, he took part in some

of the most memorable heavyweight battles since the days of Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier.

There was the trilogy with Riddick Bowe, which included two Bowe victories and a parachutist who arrived uninvited. There were his victories over aged legends George Foreman and Larry Holmes. There were two fights against a prime Lennox Lewis, neither of which Holyfield won.

And, most memorably, there were two historic fights in 1996 and 1997 against the biggest star of the era – Mike Tyson.

In the first, Holyfield, as much as a 25-1 underdog, stunned Tyson and the boxing world by scoring an 11th-round knockout. That sealed Holyfield's legacy. And then, in the rematch, a frustrated Tyson chewed off a portion of Holyfield's ear and was disqualified.

Holyfield, a religious man, forgave Tyson but none of us who witnessed the bizarre event will ever forget it.

When he was finished, Holyfield had what might seem like a mediocre record of 26-10-2 (with one no-contest and 15 knockouts) at heavyweight but the majority of losses came well past his prime, as he never gave up hope of regaining the championship a fifth time.

And it's important to note that Holyfield was a small heavyweight, which was a significant disadvantage against hulking opponents Bowe and Lewis, as well as others. I've always believed that had Holyfield been, say, 6-foot-4, 240 pounds, he would've been the greatest heavyweight of all time – even better than Ali and Joe Louis.

As it was, most experts believe he's among the greatest pound-for-pound fighters in the history of the sport. His induction into the IBHOF was a forgone conclusion.

Barrera (67-7, 44 KOs) was fortunate to arrive at the same time as another great Mexican fighter, Erik Morales, who was Frazier to his Ali.

"The Baby Faced Assassin" defeated his rival in two of three close fights but no one was cheated in one of the

MODERN

MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA

ACTIVE: 1989-2011
RECORD: 67-7 (44 KOs)
BACKGROUND: The "Baby Faced Assassin" was one of the most consistent fighters of his generation, as he won seven major titles in three weight divisions over more than two decades. And he never shied away from a challenge. He's best known for his thrilling trilogy with countryman Erik Morales, whom Barrera defeated twice, but his resume is filled with big names. He was a smart boxer with great fighting spirit, a combination that made him a fan favorite.

EVANDER HOLYFIELD

ACTIVE: 1984-2011
RECORD: 44-10-2 (29 KOs)
BACKGROUND: Holyfield was indeed the "Real Deal." He is recognized as the best cruiserweight of all time – he was 18-0 (14 KOs) at 190 pounds and was unified champion – and then became the only heavyweight to win the title four times, giving us some of the most memorable fights ever along the way. One can only imagine what he would've accomplished if he was a natural heavyweight. As it was, his blend of ability, ferocity and resilience made him one of the best ever.

JOHNNY TAPIA

ACTIVE: 1988-2011
RECORD: 59-5-2 (30 KOs)
BACKGROUND: Tapia, who died at 45 in 2012, is known for living on the edge outside the ring. That's where his nickname – "Mi Vida Loca (My Crazy Life)" – comes from. The craziness sometimes eclipses his remarkable ability and warrior mentality, though – he won major titles in three divisions in entertaining fashion. Tapia was a good athlete and excellent technician who loved to fight, all of which made him very difficult to beat and a major attraction during his peak.

OLD-TIMER

EDDIE BOOKER

ACTIVE: 1935-44
RECORD: 66-5-8 (34 KOs)
BACKGROUND: Booker was among the best on an all-too-long list of black fighters who received relatively few opportunities in boxing. He made the most of the ones he got, though, mostly on the West Coast. "Black Dynamite" was a superb boxer – particularly his defensive skills – but wasn't afraid to mix it up when he had to. He proved it against some of the best fighters of his era, beating Lloyd Marshall, Holman Williams and the legendary Archie Moore, among others. He never fought for a world title but those who saw him fight know how special Eddie Booker was.

NON-PARTICIPANT

JIMMY LENNON SR.

POSITION: Ring announcer
BACKGROUND: It's no secret where Jimmy Lennon Jr. got his silky voice and professionalism. Dad, who joins his son in the Hall, was a beloved announcer for more than three decades.

JOHNNY LEWIS

POSITION: Trainer
BACKGROUND: Lewis is a boxing institution in Australia, as he has trained fighters there for more than a half century. Among his many proteges: Joe Bugner, Jeff Fenech and Kostya Tszyu.

JERRY ROTH

POSITION: Judge
BACKGROUND: The recently retired Nevada judge worked a reported 225 world title fights over three and half decades at ringside, making him one of his state's leading officials.

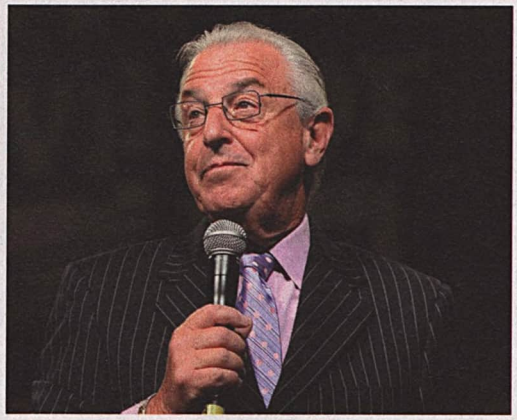
OBSERVER

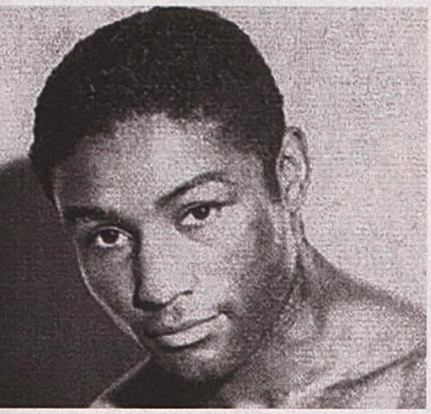
STEVE FARHOOD

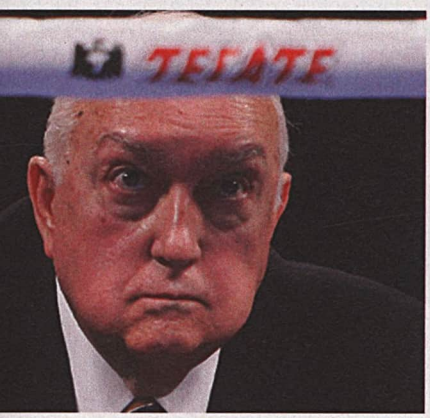
POSITION: Broadcaster and journalist
BACKGROUND: The former editor of THE RING Magazine is an accomplished writer, editor, historian and television analyst known for his depth of knowledge and integrity.

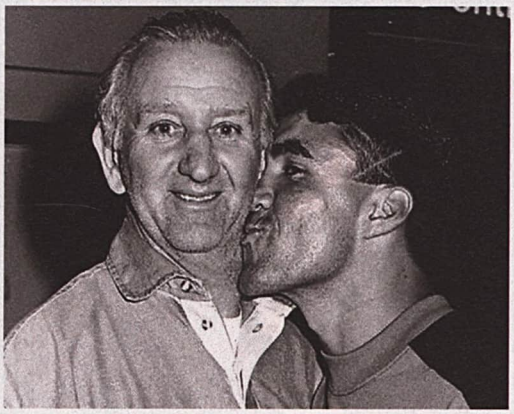
BARRY TOMPKINS

POSITION: Broadcaster
BACKGROUND: Tompkins has one of the most recognizable voices in boxing, as he has called some of the biggest fights in the sport since 1980. He is still going strong.









(Clockwise from top left) Steve Farhood, Barry Tompkins, Jimmy Lennon Sr., Johnny Lewis, Jerry Roth and Eddie Booker will be inducted in June.

wildest, most memorable trilogies ever. The first and third installments were named RING Fight of the Year.

The Arturo Gatti-Micky Ward series might've surpassed Barrera-Morales in terms of sheer mayhem but the skill level of the Mexicans was much higher.

And, of course, Barrera added to his legacy against other opponents. He took part in 26 world title fights between 1995 and 2007. He posted a record of 21-5 in those fights, losing only to Junior Jones (twice), Morales, Juan Manuel Marquez and Manny Pacquiao during that period.

Barrera's career can be divided into two parts: before and after the Jones fights, which took place in 1996 and 1997. Before, he ruled the junior featherweight division. His victory over Kennedy McKinney during that period was one of the best fights in recent memory.

Some wondered after the Jones losses whether so many wars had taken too much of a toll on Barrera. They hadn't. He changed his style to some degree rather than walk way. He still fought aggressively but became more calculating, which saved him some wear and tear.

The Morales trilogy took place post-Jones, as did impressive victories over Naseem Hamed, Tapia, Kevin Kelley, Paulie Ayala and other big-name opponents.

A game but aging Barrera lost to Marquez, Pacquiao and Amir Khan in the final years of his career but no one put too much stock into the setbacks. His legacy as one of the era's most respected and beloved warriors was already set in stone.

And, finally, there's Tapia (59-5-2, 30 KOs).

The product of Albuquerque probably was best known for his out-of-the-ring reputation, "Mi Vida Loca (My Crazy Life)," the horrible, traumatic deaths of his parents, ongoing substance abuse and a series of near-death experiences.

Lost in the insanity, to some degree, was the fact he was an exceptional fighter. He was a very good amateur, meaning he had a good fundamental foundation. And he loved to fight, which the fans could sense in his many important fights. It seemed to be life and death both outside and inside the ring when it came to Tapia, who routinely threw punches at a frenetic pace.

Tapia also took part in a remarkable number of world title fights, 20. He went 17-2-1 in those fights, losing only to Paulie Ayala in the 1999 RING Fight of the Year and Barrera for the RING featherweight championship in 2002. And it seemed every one of them was more entertaining than the last.

No one was surprised at the news of Tapia's death at 45 in 2012. Everyone knew he was on borrowed time. Thank goodness he had enough of it to touch so many lives over his 23-year career.

I loved watching Tapia fight. The same for Holyfield and Barrera. Together they make this a special Hall of Fame class.

Roberto Duran said he was a lot like Mike Tyson "before Mike Tyson came along."

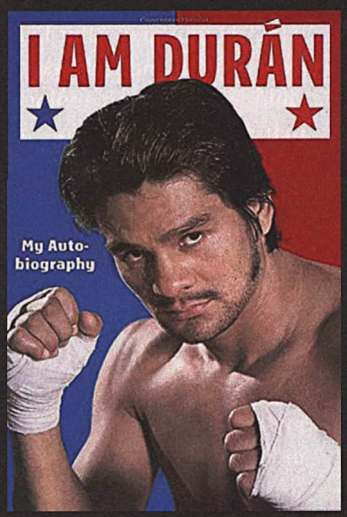
IN DURAN'S OWN WORDS

THE LEGEND'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY DOESN'T BREAK NEW GROUND BUT HAS INTERESTING NUGGETS

"I AM DURAN"
Told by Roberto Duran to George Diaz
(Blue Rider Press)

Roberto Duran had an epic career and is widely regarded as one of the greatest fighters who ever lived. His first pro fight was contested on February 23, 1968, when he was 16 years old; his last, on July 14, 2001, when he was 50. He fought during the terms of eight presidents of the United States.

At one point, Duran's ring record stood at 72 wins against a single loss. He won championships in four weight divisions and was part of a fistic round-robin with Ray Leonard, Marvin Hagler, and Thomas Hearns that electrified boxing fans in the 1980s. His finished with a record of 103-16 (70 knockouts). One can fantasize that, but for a near-fatal car accident suffered on October 4, 2001, he might still be fighting.



Duran is now a warm, almost cuddly presence on the boxing scene. He's often in the media center before big fights, having been brought in by the promotion to tap into the Hispanic market. As recounted in "I Am Duran," told by Duran to George Diaz, it wasn't always that way.

Duran's mother was Panamanian. His father, Margarito Duran, was an American soldier of Mexican and Cherokee descent who impregnated Clara Samaniego while serving with the U.S. military in the Canal Zone.

"He made me and then left when I was one-and-a-half," Duran recounts. "I wouldn't see him for another 20 years. He was nothing to me. All he did was make me, see me, and then leave me."

Roberto's mother already had a son and daughter from two previous relationships when Roberto was born.

"Life wasn't easy, but she didn't make it any easier for herself or us," Duran recalls. "I'm a child of the streets. My neighbors were thieves, whores, and murderers. I never made it past third grade. I know what poverty is because my childhood sucked. But I survived. Boxing champions never come from rich neighborhoods. They come from the barrios, the gutter. It's God's law."

Duran fought with a combination of skill and savagery that was rare in any era. On March 2, 1975, he successfully defended his lightweight title with a 14th-round knockout of Ray Lampkin, who was hospitalized after the bout. "Today, I sent him to the hospital," Duran told the media. "Next time, I'll put him in the morgue." After brutalizing Davey Moore in 1983 to claim the WBA 154-pound crown, Duran surveyed Moore's battered, swollen face and told him, "The next time, I'll kill you. You'll feel better."

"I was a fighter," Duran says. "I was paid to fight. That's who I was and what I did. In a lot of ways, I was Mike Tyson before Mike Tyson came along. Fighters would take one look at me and crap in their pants."

Duran's greatest triumph was a June 20, 1980, decision over then-unbeaten Sugar Ray Leonard to claim the 147-pound crown. Looking back on his state of mind prior to that bout, Roberto says, "Some fast little black kid from the United States wasn't going to beat me."

In the weeks and months after Leonard-Duran I, Duran, in his words, "went out drinking, dining, and partying. Night after night, we partied until everything was just one big haze. I got to the point where I weighed nearly two hundred pounds. What was I supposed to do after beating Leonard? Stay at home, go to church every day,

not screw around and not drink? That's not who I am."

Then circumstances – including the incentive of an $8 million payday – forced Duran into a rematch against Leonard on short notice. He had less than two months to get into fighting shape and lose 50 pounds.

"I wasn't feeling well," Duran says of the days leading up to the November 25, 1980, rematch. "I spent almost every day in the sauna. I went two days without eating. When I stepped on the scale [to weigh in on the day of the fight], I was weak. I could feel nothing in my legs. I was nowhere near the fighter I'd been just months earlier."

After the weigh-in, Duran ate ravenously, including two steaks washed down by orange juice, coffee and cold water. Soon after, his stomach began to hurt. That night, with both fighters in the ring, Ray Charles sang "America the Beautiful" before the bout.

"Leonard thought he'd psyched me out," Duran says. "But I wasn't intimidated by him or the blind guy singing the American's song. I just didn't feel good. My stomach trouble had been getting worse. In the eighth, we had an exchange against the ropes. But by then, I had had enough. My arms were weak. My body was weak. I couldn't move, couldn't breathe properly. I backed off and waved with my right hand. Leonard hit me a few times, but I kept motioning to the referee that I didn't want to fight. I never said 'no mas.' I just turned my back and motioned to the referee that I didn't want to continue. When the referee asked me what I was doing, all I said was 'no sigo [I do not follow].' I couldn't go on. I couldn't keep fighting. I felt like crap. But I never said 'no mas.'"

"I'm a proud man," Duran continues, "but also an impulsive one. Sometimes I make a bad decision and, in due course, think 'Oh, s---.' This was the biggest 'Oh, s---' moment of my life. But it was too late. I let my emotions get the better of me. I didn't know the world would react the way it did, and I didn't know I would get treated like s--- for so long. I didn't know it would haunt me for the rest of my life. 'No mas.' It started then and it went on for years. Even now, thirty-six years later, people still bring up that 'no mas' s---. F--- 'no mas.' I'm sick of hearing it."

"I Am Duran" has few if any new insights into boxing or Duran's magnificent ring career. But there are quite a few personal nuggets.

On Duran's first date with his future wife, Felicidad, he took her to a movie about killer rats.

Duran is also candid in the book about the lifestyle issues that have been tabloid fodder over the decades. There are accounts of debauchery, including a drunken threesome that Roberto engaged in with two women during the interval between the Hagler-Duran and Hearns-Duran fights.

"I'm a family man who loves his wife," Duran says. "But I've also slept around and fathered other children. I make no apologies for that. As world champion, as one of the most famous and honored men in Panama, I've been around temptation every day, and I'm not going to say sorry for the things I've done. I have three other children with three other women. These things happen. I'm just a man. Some people may look down on the way my life has turned out. But everyone in Panama knows my family situation, and I don't care what people think."

The other side of that coin was revealed when Duran's daughters started dating.

"I didn't mind them having boyfriends," Duran says. "But if those boys stepped out of line with my girls, I threatened to kill their entire families. I think they understood what I was saying. We didn't have a lot of problems after talks like that."

After Duran (who is 5 feet 7 inches tall) retired from boxing, his weight ballooned to 260 pounds. Doctors told him that his obesity was life-threatening. That led to the decision to undergo surgery, although "I Am Duran" is unclear on whether Roberto opted for gastric bypass surgery or the insertion of a gastric band. Both procedures are referenced in the book.

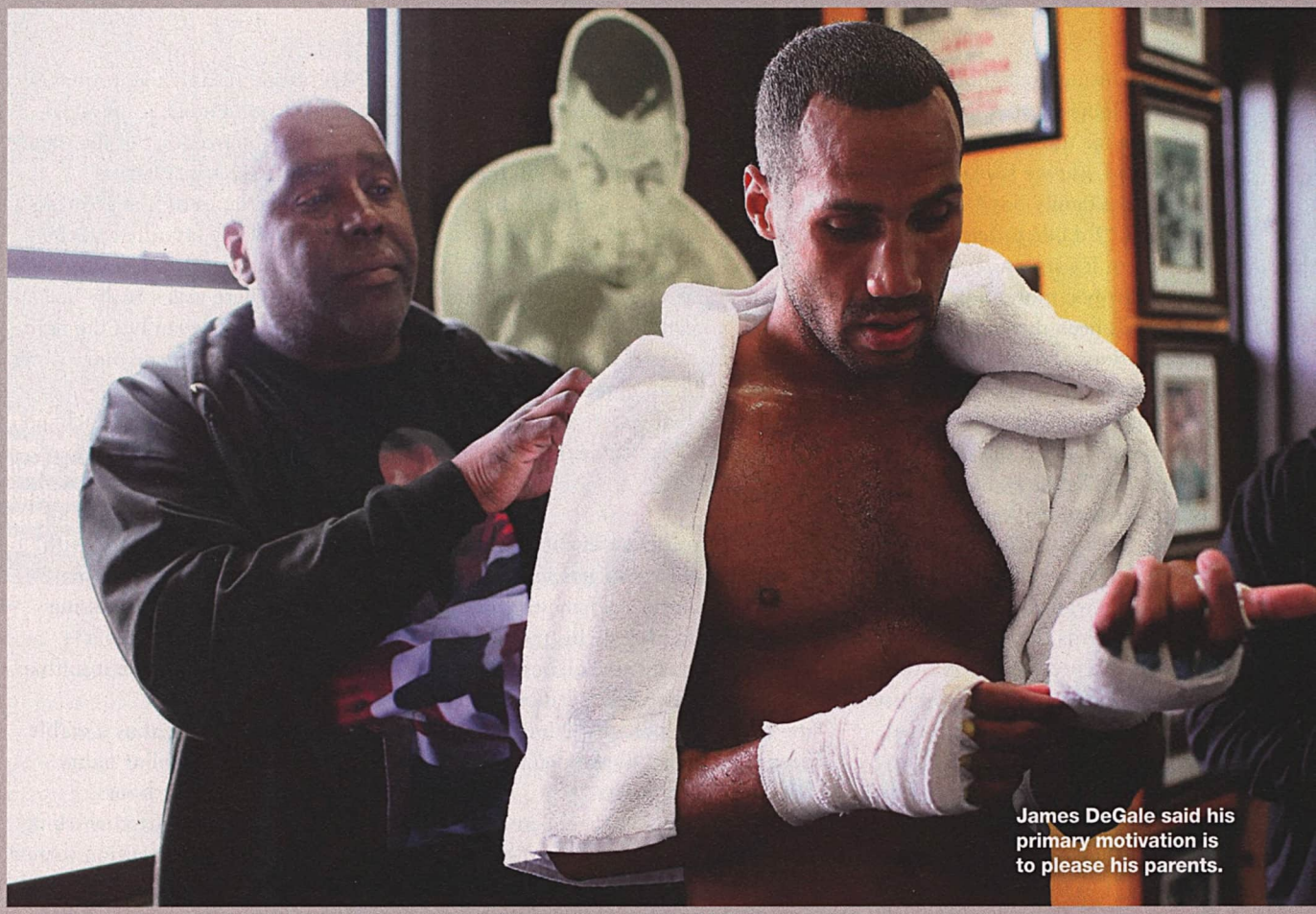
Meanwhile, throughout Duran's career, whatever money wasn't siphoned off before it reached his hands was quickly spent.

"People think I'm a millionaire," Duran says. "I used to be. I made about $60 million from my fights. But nowadays, the house is all that's left to show for it. The cash I do have goes to paying the bills for food, water, and electricity with a little bit put aside in case of emergency. The days of buying fancy cars are long gone. It's been years since I had a payout from a fight. And Panama being the place it is, I've had money problems."

Still, "I Am Duran" ends on an upbeat note.

"Look at the legacy," Duran urges in closing. "There were the Four Kings: Duran, Leonard, Hagler, and Hearns. We gave boxing fans everything and more when we fought each other. We were all stars and we all wanted to beat the s--- out of each other. We shook hands and then we fought. We hated each other's guts. And now we smile, pose for pictures, and have a drink together every so often. That's boxing."

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thauser@rcn.com. His most recent book – "A Hard World: An Inside Look at Another Year in Boxing" – was published recently by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism.



James DeGale said his primary motivation is to please his parents.

'FAMILY IS PARAMOUNT'

JAMES DEGALE HAS HAPPILY RELIED ON THOSE CLOSEST TO HIM THROUGHOUT HIS CAREER

You hear it all the time: Teamwork makes the dream work. Teams in boxing, though, come in all shapes and sizes. You get big ones and really big ones. You get ones who have been around for a while, thus knowing their fighter inside and out, and ones that have been constructed in more recent times to perhaps fix the supposed mistakes of those who came before them. You get good ones and bad ones.

In the case of super middleweight James DeGale, he's had the same core team since the day he was born. "How can that be?" I hear you ask. Simple. His core team consists of three people: his mom, his dad and his sister. That's it. There are others, of course, those primarily concerned with his boxing career – the most important of whom is his trainer, Jim McDonnell – but, for the most part, it's a family affair.

Sports psychologists often refer to fighters using their family as scaffolding propping up their house. But the DeGale house, and household, is clearly in order. Win or lose.

"I've got a brilliant family," says the Londoner. "My immediate family are very close to me. Family is paramount. I love my mom and dad. My mum's the most special woman in my life. She's like superwoman. She's the rock of the family. I'd do anything for her. That's my motivation as well, to please my mom and dad. I want them to be so proud of me. I do it for them."

More than a family, DeGale's mother, Diane, his father, Leroy, and his sister, Eloise, are also employed by him to work against the "sharks" of the boxing industry. They keep things in-house. They like to stick together. It's an admirable bond, really, one that has so far served them well.

"It's definitely a team effort from all in the family," says Eloise, who cut short a career as a dance teacher to work as her brother's personal

assistant. "During the fight camp everyone is James, James, James. Our focus is him for those 10 to 12 weeks of fight camp. But we love it."

"James is a family boy," adds McDonnell. "I'd like to see more fighters do it. It's structured. Nobody looks out for you more than your parents. He's been through the trials and tribulations and worked for different promoters. The family have been behind him from day one."

"He lets me run his business and look after him," says Diane, "but he is the one who makes all the decisions. I just go and relay them to people and get in the things he wants or the deal he wants.

"Family means the world to me. My family are my life. I don't think some people understand how close we are. Some people find it weird, other people admire it. To me, my kids are my kids until the day I die. I didn't give birth to them to have them until they're 16 and then give them away. I'm there until the day I die."

Diane's involvement tends to dwindle as the fight nears. Nerves, you see, get the better of her on fight day. She tenses up, feels ill, and chooses to cower in hotel rooms rather than sit at ringside and watch James trade damaging punches with an opponent. It's easier that way, she says. More manageable. Besides, at that point, when reality hits in the form of the opening bell, James DeGale is no longer a boxer or a champion or even an employer for Diane DeGale. He's simply her little boy.

"I went to his first fight as an amateur when he was 10 and I was a bag of nerves," says Diane. "I kept going in and out of the toilet. I was screaming and going mad and telling him not to hit the other boy because he was winning. In the end my dad, who was James' hero, turned to me and said, 'I don't think you should go to any more of his fights.' I took his word.

"Now I can't even watch his fights. I don't worry too much because I believe he's got the skills to pay the bills and he'll go in there and work hard. So long as James goes in there focused, I believe he can do it. But in boxing it only takes one punch. It doesn't matter how good you are. It's one punch that will have you laid out on that canvas. That's my worry. Still, I know that if that happened to him, he'd pick himself up, brush himself down and start all over again, because that's the name of the game."

HARLEY BENN

Fledgling middleweight Harley

Benn is another who gets much of his strength from the females who surround him, namely his mother, grandmother and sister. They are his support, his network, his motivation, the ones who look after him. "I've been surrounded by women all my life," he says proudly.

Harley's father is Nigel Benn, the former middleweight and super middleweight titleholder, but he admits the pair have little contact nowadays. It's a different relationship to the one Nigel shares with his other fighting son, Conor. Different mothers, different situations. Harley, 20, is pragmatic about it all, an old head on young shoulders, and shows no eagerness to fake a relationship in order to push along his boxing career.

"Mine and my dad's relationship hasn't been too consistent," he says. "When he heard I turned pro, he messaged me and wished me luck. But, apart from that, I haven't really had any contact. We haven't had a consistent or good relationship away from boxing. It would be quite hypocritical to pretend to the public that we have a good relationship when we don't really have a relationship at all."

Raised in Hertfordshire, but now based in Essex, Harley is waiting to make his professional debut. He will be trained by former pro heavyweight Dominic Negus, promoted by Frank Warren and supported, as always, by his mom, Lisa.

Nigel Benn, meanwhile, probably won't be around much in physical form, Harley concedes, but his legacy certainly provides inspiration.

"I watched tapes of him growing up," he says. "My favorite and the most touching one was Gerald McClellan. There was a really bad outcome for McClellan but the fight itself was a complete war, and I'd say that was my favorite one."

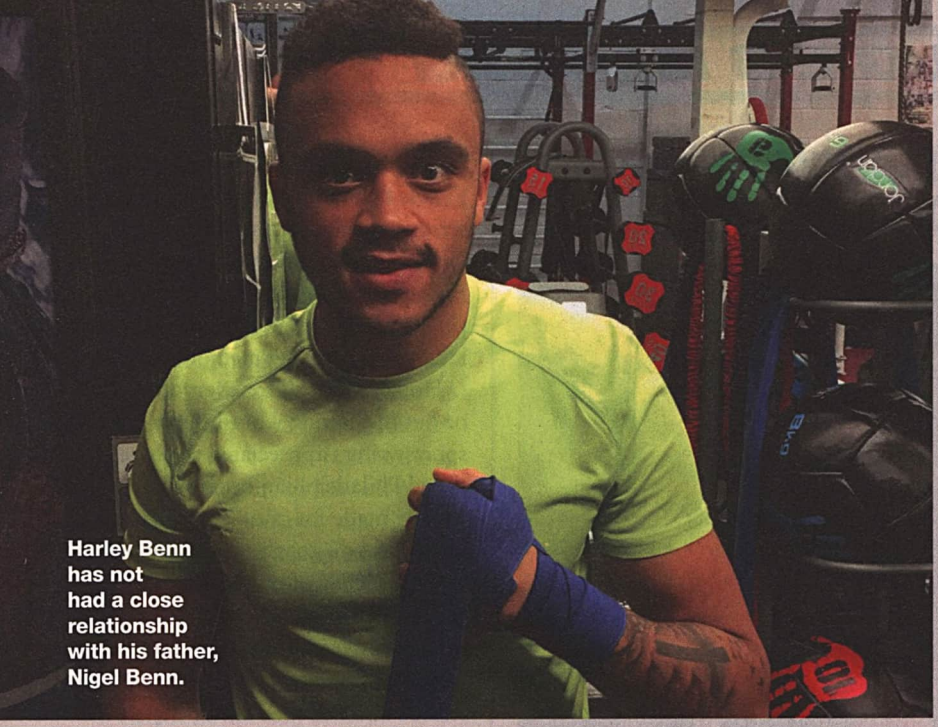
At first, Harley was more inclined to kick a ball than punch a bag. A talented soccer player, he was on the books of the Premiership Football Club Arsenal and West Ham, with their academies, before a broken leg at 15 – suffered while messing around on a moped scooter. It curtailed his plans to make it in that particular sport.

Boxing soon emerged as a viable Plan B. Some white-collar fights followed. No amateur bouts, though. Instead, he started working out with Negus and attention turned to a pro career.

"It's a long journey and I'm just at the start," he says. "I haven't had an amateur career, I'm learning on the job. As each day goes on I'm noticing progression in myself. We'll see. Each step at a time. Obviously any boxer who decides to turn professional wants to win a title. I'll get my experience before I'd like to do anything like that. But that's my main priority."

There's a sense Harley could do without the famous surname and its inevitable spotlight, that he's more than happy to fly beneath the radar and simply focus on his craft; he is, by his own admission, a novice at this, one still connecting the dots.

But, just as Chris Eubank Jr. is unable to escape the presence of his father and just as Conor Benn is unable to escape the presence of his, Harley Benn, despite the breakdown in relationship, will forever be known as the son of Nigel. It is how he will be billed and sold. It is the question many will ask of him. What's it like? Do you look up to



Harley Benn has not had a close relationship with his father, Nigel Benn.

him? He knows that, too. He accepts that. Just don't ask him if he wants to make his father proud.

"That's not at the top of my priorities," he says. "I've been brought up by a family of women. If I want to make anyone proud, it's them."

HUGHIE FURY

The fighting Fury family could this year reclaim at least one of the world heavyweight titles they lost in 2016. Hughie Fury, the WBO's mandatory challenger and Tyson Fury's younger cousin, is being lined up to face WBO titleholder Joseph Parker in the first quarter of 2017 and possibly WBC champ Deontay Wilder later in the year.

"I want the Wilder fight because I believe I am the best, and to be the best you have to beat the best," Hughie, 20-0 (10 knockouts), says. "The next fight is definitely going to be against a world champion, though. It doesn't bother me who it is. I'm ready now. If it wasn't for Tyson, these people wouldn't have belts today. There are not a lot of real champions out there."

Tyson Fury's problems are well-documented. He has not competed since dethroning Wladimir Klitschko in November 2015 and was forced to vacate the titles he so impressively won. There was a failed drug test, an admittance of depression, bizarre social media ramblings. It all amounted to turmoil. It was a twist that sent a ripple through the heavyweight division, opened it up in a sense, and Hughie is just one of many heavyweights who stand to benefit from a division devoid of a clear ruler, one instead awash in titles and opportunity.

"We'd never fight each other, Tyson and me," says the 22-year-old. "We're like brothers. But the plan is that I get my title and then Tyson comes back and we rule the heavyweight division together like the Klitschkos did."

JOSHUA VS. KLITSCHKO

Anthony Joshua, the IBF heavyweight champion, has been labeled "little bro" by former division ruler Wladimir Klitschko ahead of their clash at Wembley Stadium on April 29. Rather than a putdown, though, it was actually a sign of mutual respect, perhaps recognition of the torch being passed. And although we've grown accustomed in the U.K. to cynically rolling our eyes as fighters project animosity in order to sell pay-per-view events, Joshua and Klitschko are seemingly taking the opposite approach.

"What happens if Anthony wins this fight? I will congratulate him," Klitschko said at a Wembley press conference. "When I win this fight, I will help him come back. I was and I am and I will be very complimentary about Anthony. The first time I saw him perform here in London (Olympic Games) in 2012, I felt he was following in my footsteps.

"I see differences in the way he boxes now. He's getting the self-confidence. He trains with modern technology. He's using it to his advantage. He's 27 and he's a world champion and Olympic champion. He is 18-0 with 18 knockouts. How can I not be impressed with that?

"We are friends in a certain way. I called him 'little bro.' But even when I was in the ring with my bro (Vitali) we used to be very competitive. We will not be friends in the ring on April 29."

Their fight in April is set to generate in excess of $50 million. No wonder they're friends.

TOP 10

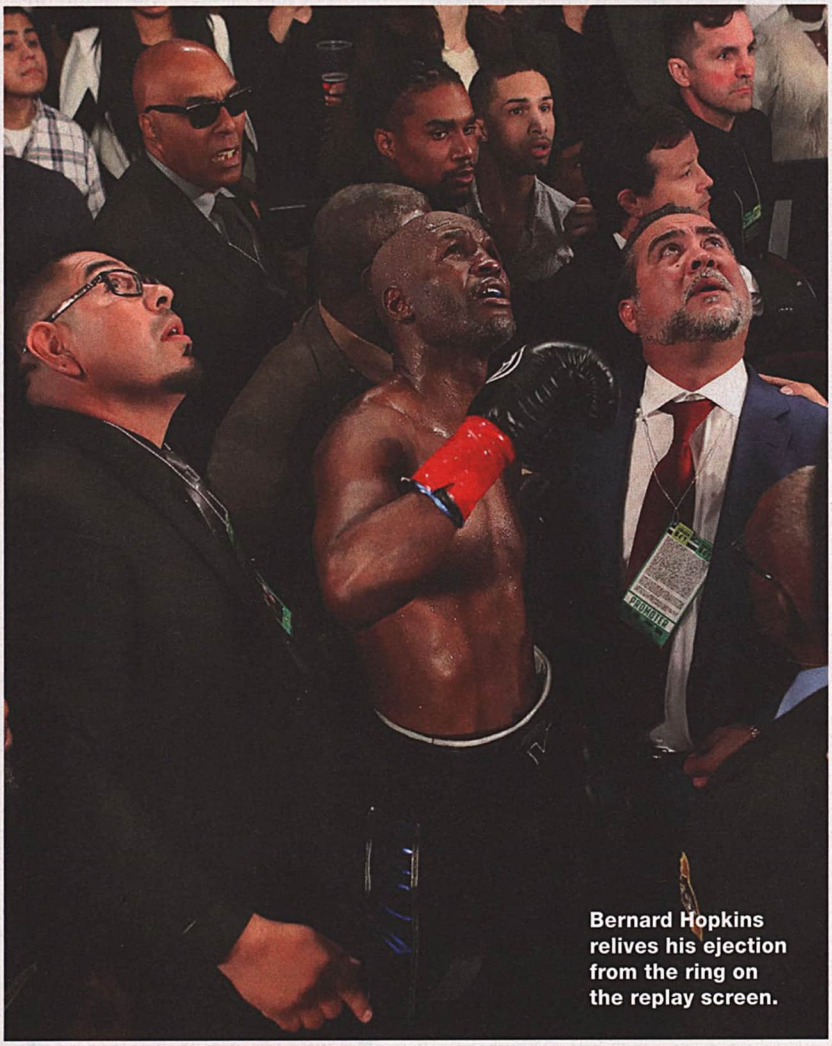
1. TYSON FURY
2. CARL FRAMPTON
3. KELL BROOK
4. AMIR KHAN
5. LEE SELBY
6. JAMES DEGALE
7. JAMIE MCDONNELL
8. SCOTT QUIGG
9. BILLY JOE SAUNDERS
10. CALLUM SMITH

11-15: Liam Smith, Tony Bellew, Terry Flanagan, Anthony Crolla, Ricky Burns.

Through fights of Dec. 31, 2016

Gareth A Davies is boxing correspondent for The Telegraph, London.

EXCERPTS FROM THE RINGTV.COM EDITOR'S POPULAR COLUMN



Bernard Hopkins relives his ejection from the ring on the replay screen.

Since 2001, RingTV.com Editor Doug Fischer has held an ongoing dialog – which occasionally becomes heated debate – with boxing fans from around the world in "Dougie's Mailbag." The following excerpts are from the Dec. 19 edition of the Monday mailbag.

MIGUEL, from Long Beach, California, says it hurt to see a "living legend" like Bernard Hopkins get knocked out of the ring and stopped in his final fight against hard-hitting light heavyweight contender Joe Smith Jr. Miguel, who says he knew Hopkins was a special fighter back when the gritty technician beat Antwun Echols in their rematch in 2000, tells Fischer: "I look forward to his commentary and what he does for boxing on the promotional end. He always rants about the 'powers that be.'"

DOUGIE'S reply: I think Hopkins is now one of the "powers that be" in boxing because of his stature in the sport, his position in one of the world's biggest promotional companies, the platform he has as an HBO commentator and due to the respect he has earned from boxing's lifeblood – the boxers and the fans. I think "B-Hop" will be one of the more visible and influential figures in boxing during his 50s.

By the way, I realized that Hopkins was an elite boxer after the FIRST Echols fight. Top that! But in all seriousness, I was ringside for Hopkins-Echols II and the future Hall of Famer's gutsy one-armed performance in that fight is one of my favorite live boxing memories.

Hopkins wasn't for everyone – in or out of the ring – but I think most sportswriters appreciated the hard-nosed Philadelphian because he usually made for good copy. With Hopkins, you got the good, the bad and the UGLY of the boxing world. He has delivered many indelible moments over the past 20 years, from the boxing-clinic upsets (Felix Trinidad, Antonio Tarver, Kelly Pavlik), to the gritty battles through adversity (Segundo Mercado I, Echols II, Jean Pascal I), to the stoppages he used to deliver back in the day (the 24-second middleweight title record TKO of Steve Frank, the brutal career-ending KO of Joe Lipsey, the body-shot downing of Oscar De La Hoya), to the "Bizarro World" stuff (the twisted-ankle no-contest after being shoved out of the ring in the first Robert Allen fight, the body slam TKO-turned-no-contest in the first Chad Dawson fight, and, yes, the knocked-out-of-the-ring stoppage against Smith in his final fight just a few weeks before his 52nd birthday).

PHILIP DU PLESSIS, of the U.K., was upset by Hopkins' insistence that he was pushed out of the ring by Smith after the fight was stopped. "Hopkins was punched legitimately three or four times before going through the ropes," says Philip, who has a hard time believing the 51-year-old veteran was unable to continue because of an injured ankle. "His feet never touched the ground yet he claims to have hurt his ankle? Looks like Smith hit Bernard so hard he lost his memory."

DOUGIE'S reply: You're trying to be funny, but that's probably what happened. Hopkins could have very well suffered a double concussion (one from the shot that had him out on his

feet and one from the back of his head slamming the concrete floor outside of the ring) less than 20 minutes before he did that post-fight dressing room interview with HBO's Max Kellerman. Hopkins wasn't even aware that he'd hit his head immediately after the fall.

Regarding the solid power punches Hopkins absorbed on his way out of the ring, you are correct in that those were legal blows Smith landed. And Hopkins was legitimately disoriented after taking those punches and then absorbing the impact of the fall. I'm sure from Hopkins' perspective (and very hazy recollection) at that time, he wasn't merely punched out but pushed out. Keep in mind that he hadn't seen any replays before he granted that post-fight interview and cut the "old man" some slack.

Regarding Hopkins' ankle, how can you know for sure that it wasn't injured in some way during or after the fall? I tell you what, let's do a little experiment. Get up in that very same ring, fall backwards, slam your spine and the back of your head on that hard floor, and then let me know if you don't feel any sort of pain in your arms or legs. (You won't even have to take any punches from Smith.)

JASON, from Pennsylvania, was saddened to see Hopkins lose in the manner he did against Smith but is quick to add that one of his all-time favorite fighters has nothing to be ashamed of. "(Hopkins) never played it safe," says Jason. "When Dawson was the man and all wrong for him, he fought him twice. Hopkins ran to Sergey Kovalev. He didn't bulls__t about networks, promotions, money, he made it happen at an age when nobody would have faulted him for taking easy fights.

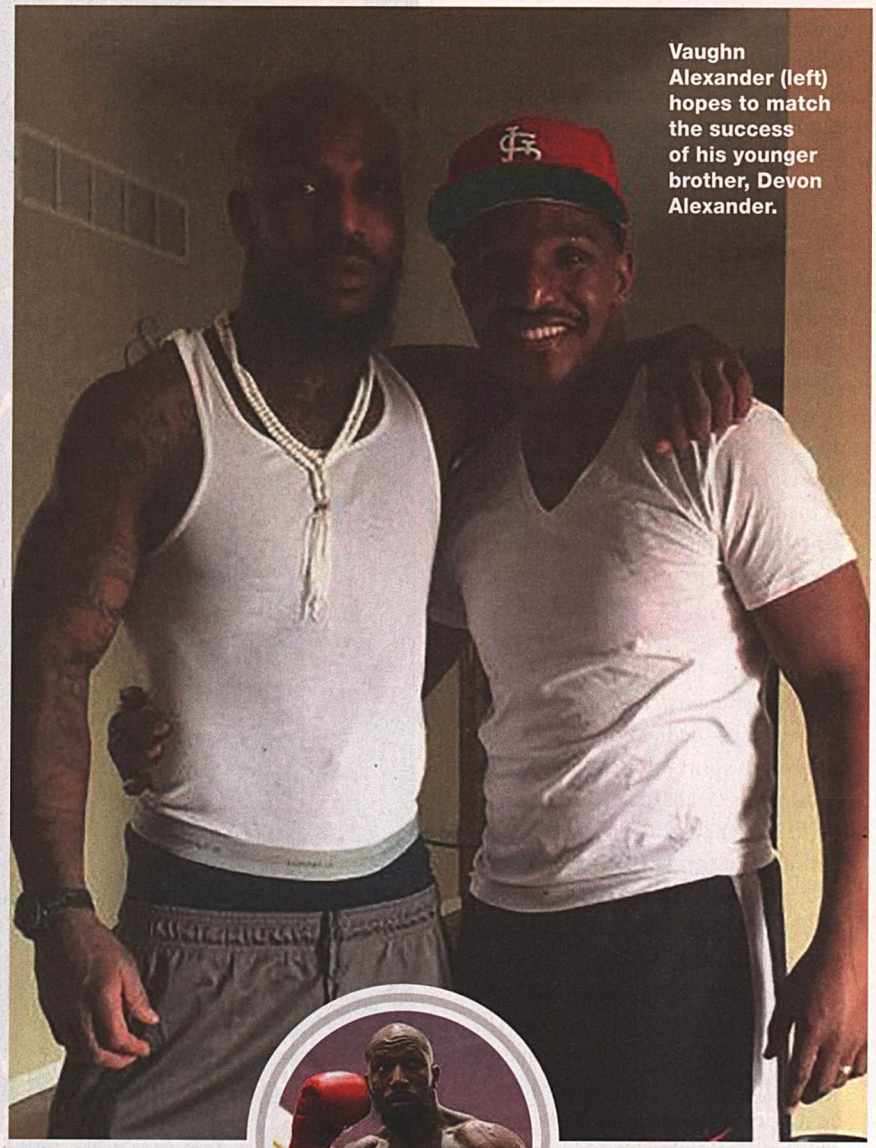
"If more fighters were like Hopkins, boxing would be much better because we would see the best fighting the best."

DOUGIE'S reply: It's going to be a very long time before we see a world-class boxer as old, accomplished and well-off as Hopkins consistently challenge himself by taking on the best fighters of his division. In fact, we may never see it, which is why whenever I've seen B-Hop in person since the Kovalev fight, I've made it a point to address him as "the last great fighter."

Hopkins did not discriminate when it came to his opponents. He faced every conceivable style and boxing attribute: slick boxers, awkward fighters, technicians, southpaws, volume punchers, power punchers, pressure fighters. You name it, he faced it, and he usually got the better of them. In his athletic prime (but not his technical peak), only a sublime talent in Roy Jones Jr. could clearly beat him.

There are several ways to assess the greatness of Hopkins – his accomplishments/record, his longevity, his dedication to his craft and to the sport – but I think his willingness to challenge himself AFTER he had already established himself as a future Hall of Famer and a top attraction in the sport is what separates him from the other standouts of the past 20-25 years. Most fighters – even elite/pound-for-pound-level boxers – would have rested on their laurels after achieving what Hopkins did in 2001, when he unified middleweight belts and equaled Carlos Monzon's title-defense record by upsetting Trinidad. Most would have taken the easy route after beating De La Hoya in a huge HBO PPV main event in 2004. At that point Hopkins was not only the undisputed middleweight champ and a respected pound-for-pound player, he was RICH! Why take any more risks?

Because that's what great fighters do. They continue to challenge themselves and push the envelope until they hit the wall. And even when that happens, the true greats – the all-timers – get up, dust themselves off and try again. That's B-Hop. After the De La Hoya victory, he had ups and downs but the highs far outweighed the lows. He made history time and time again.



Vaughn Alexander (left) hopes to match the success of his younger brother, Devon Alexander.

VAUGHN ALEXANDER

THE OLDER BROTHER OF **DEVON ALEXANDER** TRIES TO MAKE UP FOR LOST TIME AFTER MORE THAN A DECADE IN PRISON

Vaughn Alexander makes it all sound so easy.

Were there butterflies when he returned from a 12-year layoff? Not really. It took him a single round to shake off the rust in a second-round knockout of Kevin Brown in October. "I was just excited to fight," Alexander said. "I wouldn't call them butterflies."

The older brother of former two-division titleholder Devon Alexander, Vaughn is 2-0 since he was released from the Boonville Correctional Center after serving nearly 11 years of an 18-year sentence for armed robbery and assault of a police officer. He has a top promoter in Main Events to handle his career, a famous last name and an intriguing backstory to garner publicity.

It all sounds so perfect. Almost like a movie.

But Alexander, now 31, admits there was plenty of soul-searching and self-analysis along the way. Before he signed with Main Events after the bout with Brown, he had a candid discussion with the company's matchmaker, Jolene Mizzone, in which he assured her he wouldn't run afoul of the law again.

"Me and her had a heart-to-heart conversation," Alexander told THE RING in late December. "They wanted to know that I'm ready to do this and there will be no slip-ups or mishaps or stuff like that. She felt where I was coming from, and I just told her I was young and I did young things. I made a mistake and I learned from my mistake. But my mistake has allowed me to become what I am right now. A lot of people don't get a chance to discover themselves. I discovered myself in those 11 years."

And what he realized is that he still wants to box. Badly. To hear Alexander (7-0, 5 knockouts)

discuss his hopes and ambitions is to listen to a man in a hurry to make up for lost time. He's not just ready for a step-up bout. He wants Gennady Golovkin.

"I'm ready for a title shot now," he said.

At times in a nearly 30-minute interview, Alexander sounded as if he were begging, pleading for an opportunity, which he is getting. Mizzone said she was struck by his eagerness to face top talent during their 45-minute conversation back in August.

"What I loved about his mindset is that I told him I was going to put him in tough because he can fight," she recalled. "I'm not going to put you in with GGG your second fight. And he said to me, 'I've been watching tape on him. I'd love to fight him now.' I loved that.'"

Alexander was a top prospect before he went away, fighting five times in 2004 for Don King, who promoted Devon. In his return bouts, he has shown flashes of the fighter he was, including a six-round decision over Antonio Chaves Fernandez at the Mohegan Sun on November 26 in his first bout under the Main Events banner.

Mizzone, who plans to keep Alexander busy and move him fast, was impressed. And Alexander was excited.

"I'm reincarnated again," said Alexander, who trains with older brother Lamar. "I've just been staying busy to get my shot again. I still got that hunger. I still got my speed. I still got my power. I was putting guys down 11 years ago. I have that grown man strength now. I'm able to think at an all-time level when I'm in that ring now. I'm ready to fight for a world title right now. It's an undeniable feeling."

Alexander watched his brother win multiple world titles while he was incarcerated, deeds which Vaughn said were a source of joy and motivation for him. Devon hasn't fought since he lost a decision to Aron Martinez in October 2015 and is contemplating his own comeback, according to Vaughn, who is close to his brother, though they don't train in the same gym.

"He set the tone and now it's time for me to set a tone for my own path," Vaughn said. "I'm not living in 2004 or 2005, when I went to prison, because you can't get that time back. My job is to concentrate on the now. I'm living in the moment. There's nobody at middleweight who can deal with someone like me. All that's on my mind is domination." RING

THE ESSENTIALS
VAUGHN ALEXANDER

Age: 31

Weight class: Middleweight

Height: 5 feet 10 inches

Stance: Orthodox

Hometown: St. Louis

Record: 7-0, 5 KOs

Biggest strengths: Alexander possesses speed, power and good technique. He was a top prospect before he stepped away for 12 years and is 2-0 since returning. Alexander has good footwork and throws punches in combinations.

Biggest question marks: Alexander is so excited to return to the sport after more than a decade behind bars that he admits he can be overzealous and overly aggressive in the ring, putting him at risk to run into something he doesn't see. But he said he's working on remaining calm in the ring so that his aggressiveness isn't a liability.

3 MORE TO WATCH

EIMANTAS STANIONIS
WELTERWEIGHT

The 2016 Lithuanian Olympian, who has yet to make his pro debut, signed with Richard Schaefer's Ringstar Sports promotional firm in December. The 22-year-old is very polished for his age, with a patient, stalking style that should serve him well in the pros. He also has a deep amateur background. He compiled a record of 141-19, winning four senior national championships and two youth nationals; he also won a gold at the 2015 European Championships.

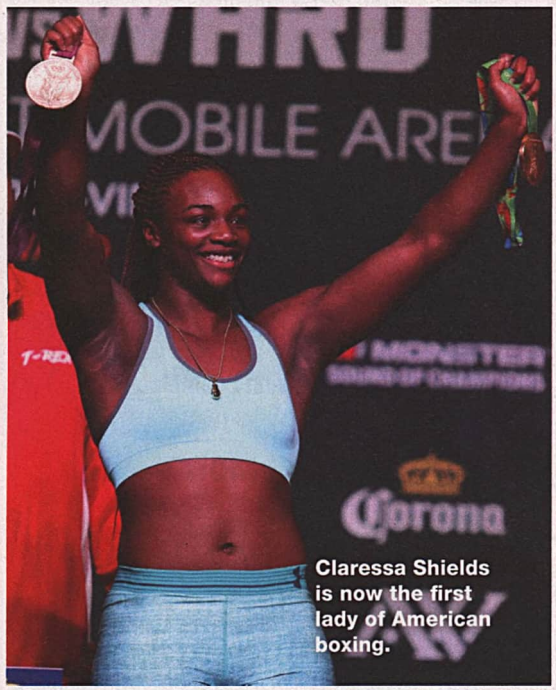
MARCUS MORRISON
MIDDLEWEIGHT

Morrison (14-0, 10 KOs) had an unconventional transition into boxing. The 23-year-old started off as a promising soccer player for Manchester City F.C. but left the sport when he was 16 and switched to boxing, signing with promoter Eddie Hearn. He is now regarded as an intriguing prospect. He outpointed Harry Matthews on the Anthony Joshua-Eric Molina undercard on December 10.

NOEL MURPHY
WELTERWEIGHT

Murphy (7-0, 2 KOs) is nicknamed the "Irish Canelo" for obvious reasons. He bears a striking resemblance to Canelo Alvarez with his red, closely cropped hair and baby-faced features. The 5-foot-9 southpaw is aggressive but stays behind a jab, which sets up his overhand left. Murphy, who is from Cork, Ireland, signed with promoter Lou DiBella and is now based in New York. He fights under the DiBella-Premier Boxing Champions banner.

GOLD STANDARD



Claressa Shields is now the first lady of American boxing.

CLARESSA SHIELDS WON A SECOND OLYMPIC TITLE AND THEN TOOK THE NEXT STEP

FIGHTER OF THE YEAR
CLARESSA SHIELDS

Some are calling Claressa Shields the most accomplished amateur boxer the United States has ever produced. And that's not a far-fetched notion. Look at the numbers: two Olympic gold medals (the only time a U.S. fighter, male or female, has done that), a 78-1 record and a 48-fight winning streak. Who can match that? And while winning that second gold medal is enough to make her the RING Female Fighter of the Year for 2016, Shields also turned pro following the Olympics, defeating Franchon Crews in November. All of this and she's only 21 years old. Claressa Shields is a game changer, not just for women's boxing but for women's sports in general. This is her first FOTY award … but definitely not her last.

FIGHT OF THE YEAR
HEATHER HARDY MD 10 SHELLY VINCENT

Before every fight, especially a highly charged one like Heather Hardy and Shelly Vincent's August showdown, the combatants declare that they're going to leave it all in the ring and give the fans a show to remember. Most fighters don't deliver on the promises. Hardy and Vincent did on national television. The fact they fought in a phone booth for 10 impossibly fast-paced rounds is a testament not just to both fighters' skill, heart and stamina but to the reality that if Hardy and Vincent were going to lose to anyone, neither wanted it to be against the other.

KNOCKOUT OF THE YEAR
ZULINA MUNOZ KO 4 VANESA LORENA TABORDA

The fans settled in for a war after both Zulina Munoz and Vanesa Lorena Taborda hit the deck in the early rounds of their WBC junior bantamweight title fight in July. Munoz had other ideas. The Mexican tagged her Argentine counterpart with several hard shots, after which a single right hand sent the challenger to the deck, face first and through Munoz's legs. "La Loba" calmly stepped over her foe and referee Rocky Burke could have counted to 50, as Taborda wasn't getting up.

UPSET OF THE YEAR
CATHERINE PHIRI TD 6 YAZMIN RIVAS

Yazmin Rivas has been a top fighter for years, going 13-1 from 2011 to 2015 and most recently successfully defending her WBC bantamweight title four times. Then, in the Mexican's first fight of 2016, came a matchup with virtual unknown Catherine Phiri of Zambia on January 30 in Rosarito, Mexico. Phiri was just 10-1 against mostly local competition, a seemingly easy mark for Rivas. Appearances were deceiving. The fight was truncated because of a cut that rendered Rivas unable to continue but Phiri was winning handily through six rounds, meaning Rivas would've needed a furious rally if she was going to rescue her title.

ROUND OF THE YEAR
HEATHER HARDY VS. SHELLY VINCENT, ROUND 2

We could probably insert here any of the 10 rounds from the Hardy-Vincent fight and it would suffice. That's how good the scrap was. But after a frenetic first round that saw the two rivals burn off any excess adrenaline, the two settled in for the war ahead. Hardy jarred Vincent a couple times but the Rhode Island native roared back in the middle of the round with excellent work on the inside. Throughout, the Brooklyn crowd roared, adding electricity to the proceedings that let you know you were witnessing something special.

TRAINER OF THE YEAR
JOHNATHON BANKS

Wladimir Klitschko recommended former heavyweight contender-turned-trainer Johnathon Banks to

undisputed welterweight champion Cecilia Braekhus in 2015. And by August of that year, the two began working together. In 2016, Braekhus had recovered from injuries that kept her sidelined for more than a year and the new combination was quickly deemed a hit, as Braekhus shut out Chris Namus and then halted Anne Sophie Mathis in two rounds. The Mathis victory marked Braekhus' first knockout win since 2013. Banks' mentor, the late, great Emanuel Steward, would be proud.

COMEBACK OF THE YEAR

YESICA YOLANDA BOPP

Long layoffs typically hurt fighters regardless of the reasons behind the time off. But one has to assume that coming back from giving birth adds to the degree of difficulty. Apparently that line of thinking doesn't apply to Argentina's Yesica Yolanda Bopp, who returned to the ring in 2016 after two years on the sidelines and took exactly one tune-up fight in April (decisioning Vanesa Lorena Taborda) before regaining the WBA junior flyweight title with a victory over Nancy Franco in June. As an encore, the 32-year-old successfully defended her crown in November by decisioning Anahi Torres.

PROSPECT OF THE YEAR

KATIE TAYLOR

The two-time Olympian from Ireland, a gold medalist in 2012, shook off the disappointment of not repeating as Olympic champion in 2016 and entered the pro game in November under the auspices of Eddie Hearn's Matchroom Boxing. By the end of the year, the 30-year-old was 2-0 with one KO. In 2017, you can expect to see Taylor stay busy on the biggest cards in Europe as she chases a world title that most expect her to get sooner rather than later.

EVENT OF THE YEAR

BRAEKHUS' DEBUT IN NORWAY

Professional boxing was illegal in Norway from 1981 to December 2014, when a 54-48 vote in Parliament repealed the "Knockout Law" and cleared the way for pound-for-pound queen Cecilia Braekhus to finally fight in her adopted home country. It was a seven-year fight for the "First Lady," who packed the 10,000-seat Spectrum in Oslo on October 1. And with her fans roaring, Braekhus capped off a homecoming like no other by stopping Anne Sophie Mathis in two rounds. "Sometimes when you fight for something for so long and it comes to the point where you actually achieve it, it's almost a little bit of an anticlimax," Braekhus told THE RING. "But this night, it was perfect. It was better than I ever dreamed it would be. I wouldn't trade one second of the night."

MOST INSPIRATIONAL

KRISTEN MCMURTREE

The ring is a place of refuge for so many, an escape that offers not just an opportunity to create something where there was nothing before, but also the confidence to deal with any situation that may arise. In the case of Lancaster, New York's Kristen McMurtree, boxing was her response to the bullying that took her from star high school athlete to a young lady just hoping for a day when she wasn't ridiculed by classmates. But in the ring, everything clicked and the sport changed her life. McMurtree won the National Golden Gloves in the 112-pound Elite Women's division in July and now has her sights set on the 2020 Olympics. And she doesn't hear those bullies anymore. RING

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH

MARCELA ELIANA ACUNA

Wins vacant 122-pound world title at 40

Want to know how tough Argentina's Marcela Eliana Acuna is? Her first two pro fights were against Hall of Famers Christy Martin and Lucia Rijker. She lost both but since then has won 45 of 50 bouts, picking up several world titles along the way. The latest, earned on December 16, saw the 40-year-old knock out 27-0-2 Yesica Patricia Marcos in the 10th round of their rematch for the vacant IBF junior featherweight crown. Simply amazing.

POUND FOR POUND

1. **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
   Norway • 29-0 (8 KOs)
   Welterweight
2. **DELFINE PERSOON**
   Belgium • 38-1 (16 KOs)
   Lightweight
3. **YESICA YOLANDA BOPP**
   Argentina • 30-1 (12 KOs)
   Junior flyweight
4. **JELENA MRDJENOVICH**
   Canada • 37-10-1 (19 KOs)
   Featherweight
5. **JESSICA CHAVEZ**
   Mexico • 28-4-3 (4 KOs)
   Flyweight
6. **LAYLA MCCARTER**
   U.S. • 38-13-5 (9 KOs)
   Lightweight-welterweight
7. **ERICA ANABELLA FARIAS**
   Argentina • 24-1 (10 KOs)
   Junior welterweight
8. **IBETH ZAMORA SILVA**
   Mexico • 27-5 (12 KOs)
   Junior flyweight
9. **ZULINA MUNOZ**
   Mexico • 48-1-2 (28 KOs)
   Junior bantamweight
10. **AMANDA SERRANO**
    U.S. • 30-1-1 (23 KOs)
    Featherweight

Through fights of Dec. 31, 2016

One of the most indelible – and sad – images of 2016 was the moment Joe Smith Jr. pounded Bernard Hopkins through the ropes in Hopkins' final fight.

RINGSIDE REPORTS

BY NORM FRAUENHEIM

JOE SMITH JR. KO 8 BERNARD HOPKINS

Date: December 17, 2016
Site: The Forum, Inglewood, Calif.
Division: Light heavyweight
Weights: Smith 174 pounds, Hopkins 174
Ring ratings (before fight): Smith No. 7; Hopkins not rated
Network: HBO

Bernard Hopkins went into the ring to Frank Sinatra's "My Way." He went out Joe Smith Jr.'s way.

Another retirement party went awry. Most do in boxing. By its very nature, the craft doesn't include many graceful exits. Yankees shortstop Derek Jeter got gifts in his final tour of Major League Baseball's parks. Lakers great Kobe Bryant got cheers and took bows in his final swing through the NBA.

Hopkins got the bum's rush.

His career, as brilliant as it was long, came to a crashing end, outside of the ropes and on The Forum floor instead of the ring canvas. There were stunned gasps instead of cheers. Hopkins couldn't even take a bow. He couldn't beat the 20-count administered for any fighter knocked out of the ring because of what he said was an ankle injury.

For a fighter with a resume that includes a record-setting 20 consecutive defenses of the middleweight title and age-defying victories for major titles at 46, 48 and then 49, more was envisioned. Perhaps a parade. But the only parade Hopkins saw was an incoming succession of punches from the surprising Smith, a laborer by trade and a fighter with jackhammer-like power.

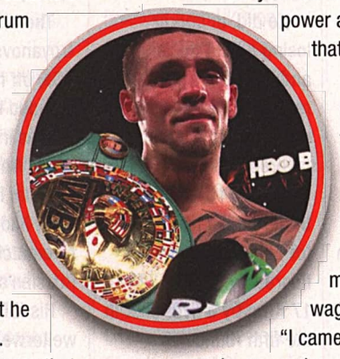
"A mess," Hopkins said.

The concussive loss punctuated all of the reasons why Hopkins (55-8-2, 32 knockouts) vowed before the opening bell that the fight would be his last. He turned 52 in January. In a November 2014 loss to Sergey Kovalev, Hopkins endured 12 brutal rounds that at one level were considered a victory simply because he survived.

He was there for the taking and that's precisely what Smith (23-1, 19 KOs) did when he caught Hopkins along the ropes with six straight punches, the finisher a left that sent the old lion tumbling into retirement at 53 seconds of the eighth.

"I know if I hadn't made a mess and gotten knocked out of the ring, I would've come back like I'm known for," said Hopkins, who earned $800,000. "I would've had my chin."

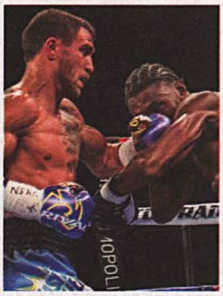
More rounds might not have left Hopkins with much else. Smith led on two scorecards, 69-64 and 67-66. Hopkins had a 67-66 edge on the third. But it's hard to imagine how Hopkins could have done much more than just survive over what could have been four-plus rounds of punishment. Early in the eighth, the 27-year-old Smith knew he had more power and perhaps the energy that comes with youth.



"I hit him with four or five clean shots, and they were good shots," said Smith, a card-carrying member of New York's Local 66 who figures to get more than just union wages over the next year. "I came here to do my job. This is my coming-out party, too. I had to finish him."

With some luck, maybe Smith also finished off something that never really works in boxing. It's time to retire those retirement fights. »

WORLDWIDE RESULTS— Go to: bit.ly/worldwide-results or scan the QR code to see weekly fight results at RingTV.com.



NO. 3 VASYL LOMACHENKO TKO 7 NICHOLAS WALTERS

Nov. 26, Las Vegas (HBO)

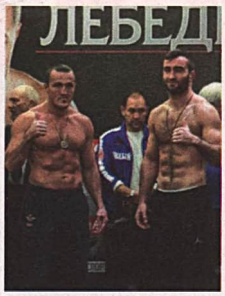
Bob Arum thought he had seen it all, until he saw Vasyl Lomachenko.

Arum continued to see a fighter he thinks could be the next Ali in another singular performance from the Ukrainian prodigy (7-1, 5 KOs), who helped the promoter celebrate his 2,000th card with a skillset that left Nicholas Walters (26-1-1, 21 KOs) so helpless that his corner said no mas after seven rounds.

"My goal is to be No. 1 pound for pound," Lomachenko said after only his eighth pro fight.

So far Lomachenko's emergence is unprecedented, even with a loss to Orlando Salido in his second fight. He has already won titles in two divisions: featherweight and junior lightweight.

Now there's talk about Terence Crawford and even Manny Pacquiao at heavier weights. A victory over either would be a surefire step toward the top of that pound-for-pound scale.



NO. 10 MURAT GASSIEV SD 12 NO. 1 DENIS LEBEDEV

Dec. 3, Moscow (Sky Sports)

Anybody for a rematch?

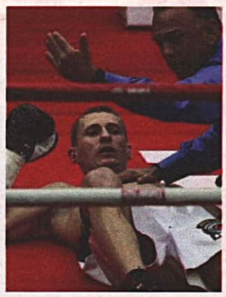
Denis Lebedev-Murat Gassiev II looks to be inevitable after Gassiev upset Lebedev for one piece of the cruiserweight title. It's not exactly clear why just one belt and not two were at stake.

According to reports from Russia, Lebedev's promoter struck a deal with the WBA that allowed Lebedev to remain its champ even if he lost.

He did, of course, losing a split decision and the IBF belt yet retaining the WBA version. Two judges favored Gassiev, 116-112 and 116-111. The third had it 114-113 for Lebedev, who was floored by Gassiev (24-0, 17 KOs) by a liver shot in the fifth round.

"It seems to me I won or at least I could have been given a draw," Lebedev (29-3, 22 KOs) told Russian media.

Maybe not the draw, but Lebedev got a different gimme: another chance to defend the WBA title.



JULIUS INDONGO KO 1 NO. 4 EDUARD TROYANOVSKY

Dec. 3, Moscow (Sky Sports)

Unknown and unseen added up to a punch that Eduard Troyanovsky never anticipated. After an exchange as brutal as it was quick, Troyanovsky found himself with his first loss.

Forty seconds after the opening bell in Julius Indongo's first pro bout outside of his native Namibia, he threw a long, looping left hook that landed on Troyanovsky's wide-open chin like a bat on a fastball.

The blow launched Troyanovsky (25-1, 22 KOs) off his feet and dropped him onto the canvas in an unconscious heap. When he awoke, he must have wondered what had just happened. A rematch was the Russian's only hope.

His IBF junior welterweight belt was gone, taken by the unlikely Indongo (21-0, 11 KOs), a Beijing Olympian who suddenly went from fringe contender to a potential player in a division dominated by Terence Crawford.

NO. 6 JOSEPH PARKER MD 12 NO. 10 ANDY RUIZ JR.

Dec. 10, Auckland, New Zealand (Box Nation, HBO)

It was a first. Joseph Parker did for New Zealand what David Tua couldn't; he won a heavyweight title.

It wasn't easy. But it was a Kiwi beginning, perhaps of the next chapter in a heavyweight story that held great promise but faltered when Tua lost to WBC/IBF titleholder Lennox Lewis in 2000.

"A dream come true," Parker (22-0, 18 KOs) said after taking the WBO belt stripped from Tyson Fury.

But it was close – too close – to a nightmare for the 24-year-old born in South Auckland. Andy Ruiz Jr. (29-1, 19 KOs) was the early aggressor in front a crowd of Parker partisans, enough to make the fight even at 114-114 for one judge. In the eyes of the other two, however, Parker did enough for a 115-113 edge on each of their cards.

Next? Parker's camp was talking about a bout with Hughie Fury (Tyson's cousin) or David Price.

NO. 5 ANTHONY JOSHUA TKO 3 ERIC MOLINA

Dec. 10, Manchester, U.K. (Sky Box Office, Showtime)

The first stage is done. Anthony Joshua said goodbye to his days as a heavyweight novice. It was fun. Now, it's on to something more challenging.

What awaits him is the first true test of the potential he has shown since his gold medal at the 2012 Olympics. Who awaits him is Wladimir Klitschko – aging, yet still a legend.

"He's a great champ and I respect him. He wants the belts back, so let's get it on," Joshua (18-0, 18 KOs) said after dropping, then stopping Molina (25-4, 19 KOs) at 2:02 of the third, or as fast as he could in order to address a crowd about the upcoming blockbuster.

Joshua-Klitschko is scheduled for April 29 at London's Wembley Stadium. It's a big place, but it won't be big enough for everybody who wants a seat at the biggest heavyweight fight in years.

NO. 3 JERMALL CHARLO KO 5 NO. 8 JULIAN WILLIAMS

Dec. 10, Los Angeles (Showtime)

There was anger in Jermall Charlo's punches. Anger in his celebration, too.

Charlo got a victory but not the apology he sought in a fifth-round stoppage of Julian Williams in defense of his IBF junior middleweight title.

After Charlo (25-0, 19 KOs) finished Williams with a left for a third knockdown at 2:06 of the fifth, Williams (22-1-1, 14 KOs) offered congratulations.

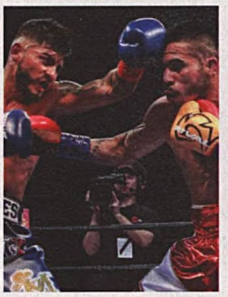
"I don't want your congratulations, I want your apology," Charlo told him.

Charlo was still seething at trash-talk from Williams.

"No matter what, people have to respect my accomplishments," said Charlo (25-0, 19 KOs), who set Williams up for the finish with a picture-perfect right uppercut. "I told everyone what I was going to do."

Then Charlo told everyone he wants Canelo Alvarez.

"I want to unify, the WBO with Canelo, the WBC or WBA," he said. "Where are you?"



NO. 5 ABNER MARES SD 12 NO. 7 JESUS CUELLAR

Dec. 10, Los Angeles (Showtime)

Featherweight, a division as fiercely competitive as any, just wouldn't be the same without Abner Mares.

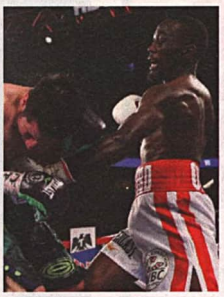
Amid talk of Gary Russell Jr.'s potential dominance, the Carl Frampton-Leo Santa Cruz rematch on Jan. 28 and Oscar Valdez's emergence, it might have been easy to forget Mares.

Too easy.

Mares made sure that wouldn't happen, reminding everyone he was still a force with a disciplined decision over Jesus Cuellar.

"I am so glad to be back," Mares said after a 16-month layoff that included a license denied in New York because of questions about his left eye. "People wrote me off. But I never wrote myself off."

Mares (30-2-1, 15 KOs), a 116-111 and 117-110 winner on two cards, scored an 11th-round knockdown of Cuellar (28-2, 21 KOs), who somehow was favored 115-112 on the third scorecard.



C TERENCE CRAWFORD TKO 8 NO. 6 JOHN MOLINA

Dec. 10, Omaha, Neb. (HBO)

Staying busy meant a couple of things for Terence Crawford. Call it a double-edged sword. First, he made a statement. Then, he got a sentence.

The statement came in a predictable victory over John Molina. Poor Molina (29-7, 23 KOs) never had a chance against the many skills and quicksilver speed of the reigning junior welterweight champion, who enhanced his pound-for-pound credentials by scoring an eighth-round stoppage.

"I showed everything," said Crawford (30-0, 21 KOs), who believed he had done enough to be Fighter of the Year.

Five days later, he was sentenced to jail. In September, Crawford was convicted on misdemeanor charges of property damage and disorderly conduct during a disturbance at an Omaha auto-body shop last spring. He was sentenced to 90 days. According to guidelines, he would serve 53 days.

He was immediately jailed, then released hours later on a $10,000 bond, pending an appeal.

NO. 1 OLEKSANDR USYK KO 9 THABISO MCHUNU

Dec. 17, Los Angeles (HBO)

Gennady Golovkin, Sergey Kovalev and Vasyl Lomachenko have preceded him. More and more, they create the expectations for everybody else from Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine.

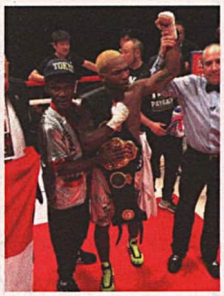
Oleksandr Usyk is supposed be the latest in that lengthening line.

But reviews of his U.S. debut fell into the wait-and-see category. Usyk (11-0, 10 KOs), a 2012 Olympic gold medalist from Ukraine, overwhelmed Thabiso Mchunu with his power. He knocked down the South African (17-3, 11 KOs) three times, first in the sixth and twice in the ninth.

But he didn't do much more in an otherwise dull defense of the cruiserweight title he took from Krzysztof Glowacki in Poland last September.

"We were hoping to get the knockout earlier," Usyk said. "But we got it, and we're looking forward to bringing more fights to this cruiserweight division."

Hopefully better ones, too.



NO. 5 JEZREEL CORRALES SD 12 NO. 6 TAKASHI UCHIYAMA

Dec. 31, Tokyo (Tokyo TV, tape delay)

A New Year arrived and nothing had changed for Jezreel Corrales. He is still the WBA's 130-pound champion.

Corrales returned to Panama with the same belt he took from Takashi Uchiyama with a stunning stoppage in Japan last April.

This time it was more difficult. Corrales needed 12 rounds instead of two. He got up from a fifth-round knockdown. He had to survive and then hope the cards would go his way. He did. They did.

Corrales (21-1, 8 KOs) won on two, 117-110 and 115-112. The third favored Uchiyama 114-113.

"I wasn't sure I'd definitely win," Corrales said. "But I felt I did enough."

Another rematch? Maybe. Uchiyama (24-2-1, 20 KOs) wasn't sure.

"I have not decided yet," he said. "I was just going to win and didn't think of any other things."

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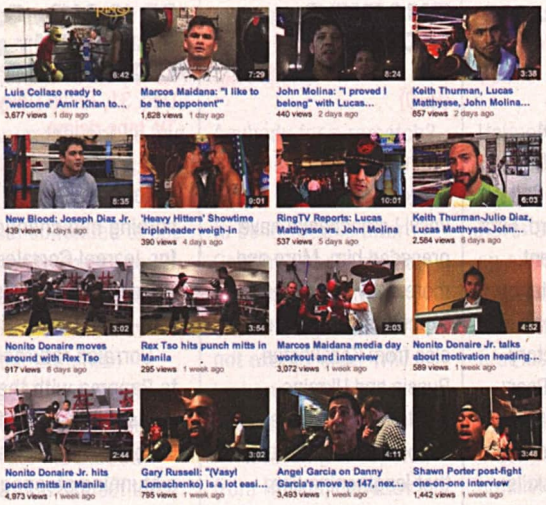

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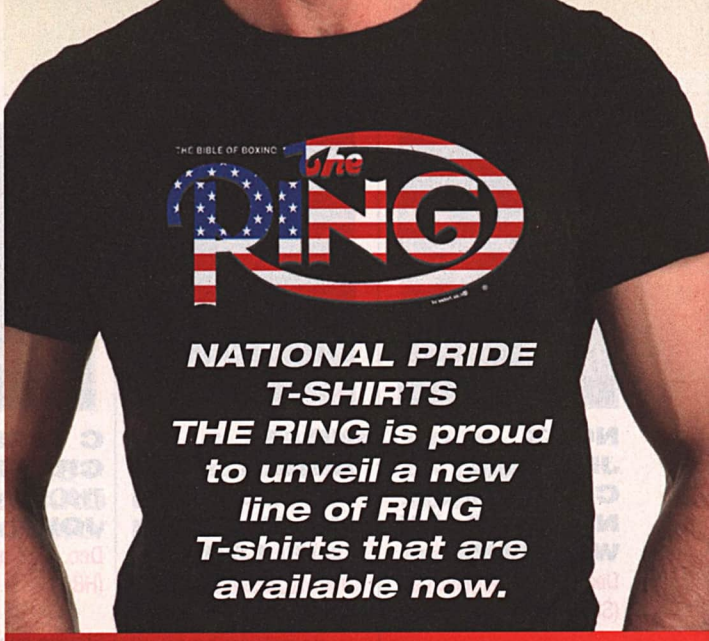

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COMING UP

Predictions are made by RING staff members Mitch Abramson, Doug Fischer, Brian Harty and Michael Rosenthal

Carl Frampton (left) and Leo Santa Cruz are scheduled to fight each other again on Jan. 28.

JANUARY

JAMES DEGALE VS. BADOU JACK

Date: Jan. 14
Location: Barclays Center, Brooklyn, N.Y.
Division: Super middleweights (for the vacant RING, DeGale's IBF and Jack's WBC titles)
RING Ratings: DeGale No. 1; Jack No. 2
TV: Showtime
Watchability rating (up to five stars): ★★★★
Also fighting: Jose Pedraza vs. Gervonta Davis, junior lightweights (for Pedraza's IBF title); Amanda Serrano vs. Yazmin Rivas, junior featherweights (for Serrano's WBO title).
Significance: DeGale (23-1, 14 KOs) and Jack have quietly built strong resumes over the past few years but have yet to score a breakout victory. This could be it. DeGale, a 2008 Olympic gold medalist, uses his boxing skills and athleticism – but limited aggression – to win fights. Jack (20-1-2, 12 KOs) is more of a blue-collar fighter who generally outworks his opponents. This is a 50-50 fight.
Prediction: Rosenthal – DeGale UD; Fischer – DeGale SD; Harty – DeGale UD; Abramson – DeGale UD

CARL FRAMPTON VS. LEO SANTA CRUZ II

Date: Jan. 28
Location: MGM Grand, Las Vegas
Division: Featherweights (for Frampton's WBA title)
RING Ratings: Frampton No. 2; Santa Cruz No. 4
TV: Showtime
Watchability rating (up to five stars): ★★★★★
Also fighting: Dejan Zlaticanin (No. 1) vs. Mikey Garcia, lightweights (for Zlaticanin's WBC title); Lee Selby (No. 2) vs. Jonathan Victor Barros, featherweights (for Selby's IBF title).
Significance: Frampton (23-0, 14 KOs) defeated Santa Cruz (32-1-1, 18 KOs) by a majority decision that should've been unanimous in July. The entertaining fight was competitive – as Santa Cruz rallied to some degree – but Frampton, born with more natural gifts, clearly outboxed his new rival. The big question: Can Santa Cruz make the necessary adjustments required to turn the tables on the Irishman?
Prediction: Rosenthal – Frampton UD; Fischer – Frampton UD; Harty – Frampton UD; Abramson – Frampton UD

JAN. 13 – Erislandy Lara (No. 3) vs. Yuri Foreman, junior middleweights (for Lara's WBA title), Hialeah, Fla. (PBC on Spike). Also, Anthony Dirrell (No. 7) vs. Norbert Nemesapati, super middleweights.
JAN. 20 – Adam Lopez vs. Danny Roman, junior featherweights, Atlantic City, N.J. (Showtime).
JAN. 21 – Zab Judah vs. Jorge Munguia, welterweights, Trenton, N.J.
JAN. 27 – Erick DeLeon vs. Jose Salinas, junior lightweights, Studio City, Calif. (UniMas).
JAN. 28 – Francisco Vargas (No. 2) vs. Miguel Berchelt, junior lightweights (for Vargas' WBC title), Indio, Calif. (HBO). Also, Takashi Miura vs. Miguel Roman, junior lightweights.
JAN. 28 – Cecilia Braekhus (No. 1) vs. Klara Svensson, welterweights (for Braekhus' IBF, WBA, WBC and WBO titles), Oslo, Norway.

FEBRUARY

FEB. 2 – Sammy Vasquez vs. Luis Collazo, welterweights, Tunica, Miss. (PBC on FS1/Fox Deportes).
FEB. 3 – Felix Verdejo (No. 8) vs. Oliver Flores, lightweights, San Juan, Puerto Rico (UniMas).
FEB. 3 – Anthony Mundine vs. Danny Green, cruiserweights, North Adelaide, Australia
FEB. 10 – Robert Easter Jr. (No. 3) vs. Luis Cruz, lightweights (for Easter's IBF title), Toledo, Ohio (PBC on Bounce TV). Also, Rau'shee Warren (No. 2) vs. Zhanat Zhakiyanov, bantamweights (for Warren's WBA title).
FEB. 17 – Roy Jones Jr. vs. Bobby Gunn, cruiserweights, Wilmington, Del. (pay per view).
FEB. 17 – Jose Felix Jr. vs. Jonathan Maicelo, Laredo, Texas (UniMas).
FEB. 18 – Gary Russell Jr. (No. 1) vs. Oscar Escandon, featherweights (for Russell's WBC title), Cincinnati (Showtime). Also, Jermell Charlo (No. 5) vs. Charles Hatley, junior middleweights (for Charlo's WBC title) and Adrien Broner (No. 2) vs. Adrian Granados (No. 5), junior welterweights.
FEB. 24 – Eleider Alvarez (No. 4) vs. Lucian Bute, light heavyweights, Quebec City, Canada
FEB. 25 – Miguel Cotto (No. 4) vs. James Kirkland, junior middleweights, Frisco, Texas (HBO Pay-Per-View). Also, Guillermo Rigondeaux (No. 1) vs. Moises Flores (No. 7), junior featherweights (for Rigondeaux's WBA title).
FEB. 25 – Deontay Wilder (No. 2) vs. Andrzej Wawrzyk, heavyweights (for Wilder's WBC title), Birmingham, Ala. (PBC on Fox).

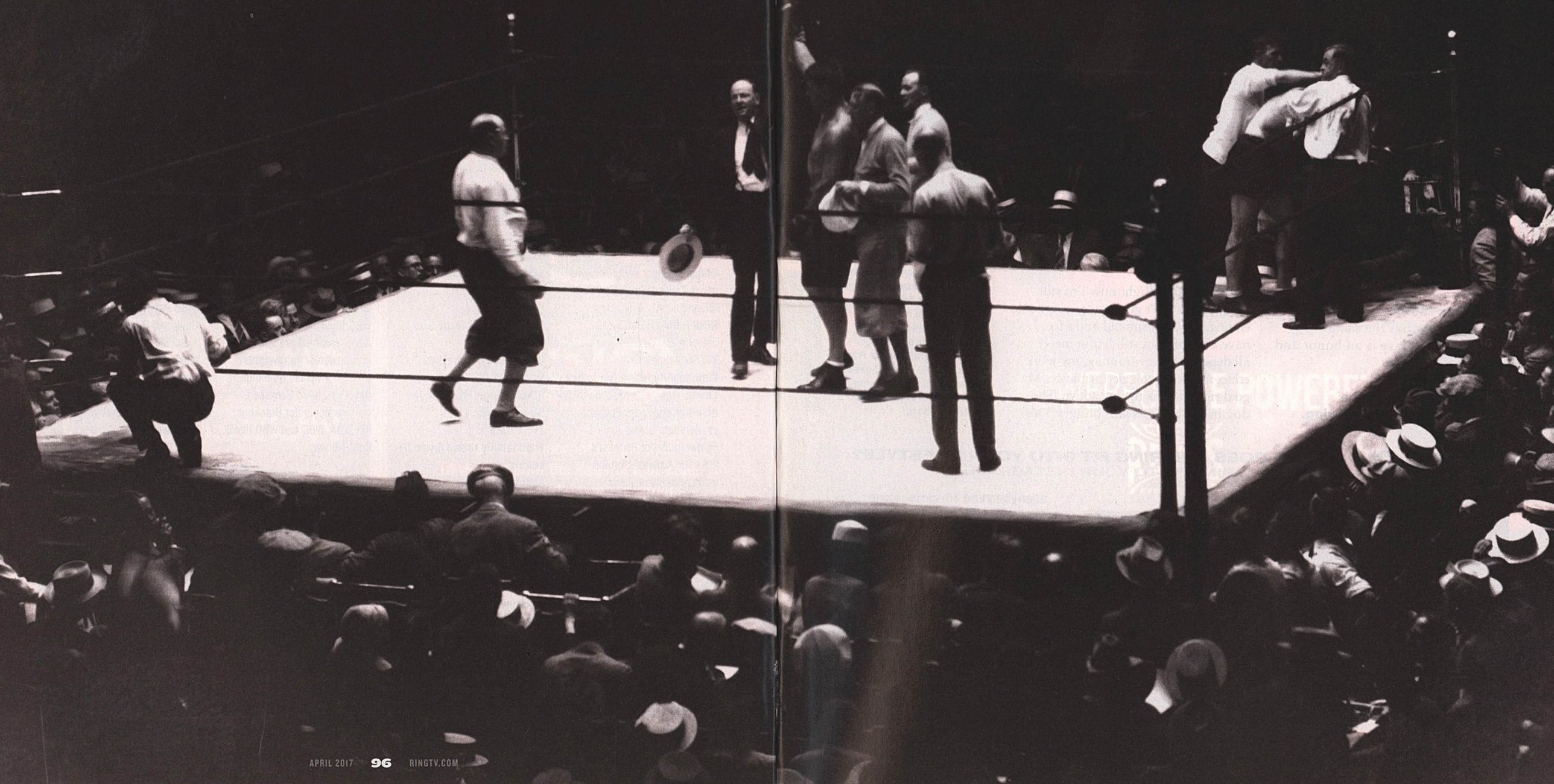
MARCH

MARCH 4 – Keith Thurman (No. 2) vs. Danny Garcia (No. 7), welterweights (for Thurman's WBA and Garcia's WBC titles), Barclays Center, Brooklyn (Showtime).
MARCH 4 – Tony Bellew (No. 3 cruiserweight) vs. David Haye (No. 9), heavyweight, London (Sky Box Office).

Amanda Westcott

LAST HURRAH

Heavyweight champion Gene Tunney was the first RING Magazine Fighter of the Year, in 1928, the year this photo was taken. It depicts Tunney with his hand being raised after beating a very good heavyweight from New Zealand named Tom Heeney on July 26 at the house Babe Ruth was still in the process of building, Yankee Stadium. Tunney won by an 11th-round technical knockout in his only fight of the year. These were his last moments in the ring, as he retired soon after. Of course, the victory over Heeney wasn't the most significant in Tunney's career. Those came during the previous two years, as he beat the great Jack Dempsey in 1926 and then again in 1927, in the "long count" fight, to secure his place as one of the most significant fighters in the history of the sport. The second Dempsey fight had taken place 10 months before he met Heeney, who had Dempsey in his corner, but, by all accounts, Tunney showed no rust. Referee Eddie Forbes intervened with eight seconds remaining in the 11th to save Heeney from further punishment after the champ had dished out a fearful beating. That's Heeney being tended to on the right side of the ring. He was never the same. He would continue fighting until 1933 but he lost many more fights than he won. He lived until 1984. Tunney called it quits a few days after the fight, saying he saw no challenger who could generate public interest. He was only 31. Tunney died in 1978 but remains a boxing legend. RING



By **Lamar Clark**

FOR BOXING AFICIONADOS ONLY

Q&A: James Kirkland

Five-time world titleholder Miguel Cotto (40-5, 33 knockouts) will return to the ring February 25 when he takes on James "Mandingo Warrior" Kirkland (32-2, 28 KOs) in Frisco, Texas. Coming off respective losses to Canelo Alvarez, both fighters will be seeking redemption in a 12-round junior middleweight showdown.

I spoke with Kirkland in NYC during the press tour about his career.

THE RING: Talk to me about this opportunity with Cotto.

KIRKLAND: "Miguel Cotto is an icon in this boxing game, someone who's gonna put on a great performance every time, so to be able to step into the ring with somebody that has the same devotion that I have is an honor and a privilege."

THE RING: You've had a interesting journey in boxing. Looking back, is there anything you wish you did differently?

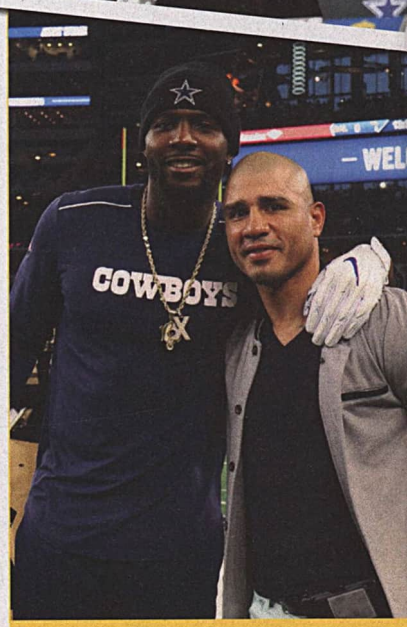
KIRKLAND: "(Laughs.) I've got 99 things I wish I did differently."

THE RING: Ha! Give me two.

KIRKLAND: "Having more qualified people around me and being more active in the sport. Those are two of the big things I'd change. Major things take place, and trying to figure out the game of boxing and learning your worth takes time. Those are things I look at differently now."

THE RING: Storybook ending to your career, what does that look like?

KIRKLAND: "Right now I'm still hungry, so I can't give you a storybook ending. I'm 32 years old and I feel I have a lot of fight still left in me. It all depends on my training, my work ethic, my skills, this performance. My goal right now is to stay active. The dog in Kirkland is still hungry." RING



Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones (top) participated in the announcement of the February 25 fight between Miguel Cotto and James Kirkland, which will take place at one of Jones' venues, Ford Center in Frisco, Texas. Cotto (bottom) gave Dez Bryant signed boxing gloves prior to a game at AT&T Stadium.

KIRKLAND: JEREMIAH JHASSROC NATION SPORTS/JEREMIAH JHASS

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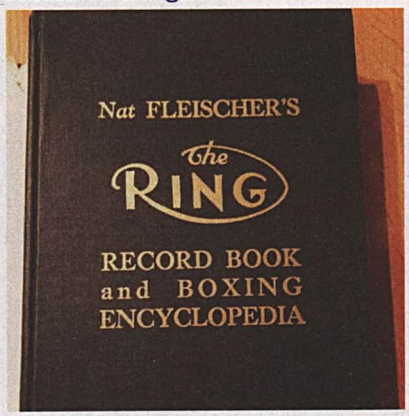

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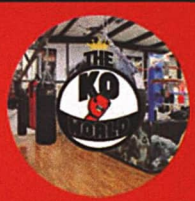

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